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POLAND



THE POLISH EAGLE



PEASANT GIRLS IN THE WAWEL. *Page 29.*



PEEPS AT MANY LANDS

POLAND

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"ADAM MICKIEWICZ, THE NATIONAL POET OF POLAND,"
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"KOSCIUSKO," ETC.

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IN COLOUR—INCLUDING TWO BY ARTUR GROTTER

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TO
MY NEPHEW AND NIECE
HILARY AND RACHEL

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POLAND

CHAPTER I

A RAMBLE IN POLAND

THERE is a country lying to the east of Europe, between Germany and Russia—a land of forests, plains, and cornfields. It is a country that through hundreds of years shed her blood in torrents in defence of the Christian world, driving back again and again fierce multitudes of Turks and Tartars as they swept like an angry sea against the European frontiers. The name of that country is Poland.

Even those of us who know very little about Poland vaguely connect the word with thoughts of knights and heroes, of Polish men and women dying side by side on the walls of Warsaw, or in lonely forests, or in mines and prisons, for the love of their country. Pictures of glory and suffering rightly crowd into our minds when we think of Poland. Yet though she was once the greatest country in Eastern Europe, and reached from the Baltic to the Black Sea, from the heart of modern Prussia far into the Russia of to-day, for many years before the Great War we could find no name of Poland on the map of Europe except one small portion marked as a Russian province. For in the eighteenth century Austria, Russia, and Prussia,

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whose territories surrounded Poland, fell upon her, and divided the unhappy country between them.

But the Polish people have always remained true to the thought of their dear country. Ever since the time, more than a hundred years ago, that Poland was torn in three, the history of the Poles was one of the greatest suffering and the greatest heroism. They have been imprisoned, sent to Siberia for all their lives, flogged and tortured, forbidden to speak their own language or to teach it to their children; but through all this, and worse, they have been determined never to lose their own nationality, and to have their own country back again. And though the Poles were all divided under three different Governments, they were all one in heart and in the intense love they bore to their country. The three divisions of Poland were called "Russian" Poland, "Austrian" Poland, and "Prussian" Poland; but the Poles became neither Russians, Austrians, nor Prussians. They were Poles, and Poles they resolved to remain. Therefore, when Poland was restored, in 1918, the Poles were ready, waiting for their freedom.

A large part of Poland is covered with rich golden cornfields. Or, again, we are among the great wild marshes, where geese and wild birds cry and call to each other. In the far east of Poland stretch the steppes—immense plains rolling as far as the eye can see, till they almost appear to touch the horizon. They are carpeted with flowers. Over them the winds sweep, sighing mournfully, seeming to sing the dirge of the thousands of unknown Polish dead who sleep there. For in old days these were the outposts of Poland, into which Tartars rushed from the east,

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burning, slaying, carrying women and girls into slavery; and where the Polish knights fought against them in an unending sort of border warfare. These Polish steppes, with their monotony, their silence broken only by the plaintive voices of birds or the beat of a hawk's or eagle's wing, have an intensely melancholy effect upon those who are not used to them; but Poles born there love them so passionately that, when driven into exile, they pine with homesickness and longing to breathe their air and wander over them once more.

Let us next go into the forests, the huge forests that, especially in Lithuania, the part of Poland that, north-east, touches Russia, are among the chief beauties of Poland. To the bitter indignation of the Poles, the Germans, when for a while they captured Poland in the Great War, did their best to fell them down. Wolves and bears dwell in the forests, and in the depths of those in Lithuania may be found the urus, a sort of bison, scarcely ever to be met with in the rest of Europe. The age of the noble old trees goes so far back that they have seen heroes who have been dead hundreds of years beneath their boughs. Some of them are so enormous that twenty people could comfortably sit down to supper within one trunk.

No human foot has ever trodden the deepest recesses of these Lithuanian forests. The people's legends say that beyond the known tracts, where even the hunter's foot has never reached, your way will suddenly be barred by a great barrier of trunks of trees, gnarled roots, rotting logs, surrounded by quagmires and impassable streams, and by a network

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of twining plants and hornets' nests and deadly snakes. If you ever could get past such a place, you would come to ponds all overgrown with weeds, so deep that no one has ever sounded their bottom. Their waters are now blood-red, or, again, they seethe and boil as if something were troubling them beneath, and throw up vapours that strip the trees around them—trees all bent and distorted and clammy with moss—of their bark and leaves. The Lithuanian peasant will tell you that there are spirits down below those ponds; and they add a strange story that beyond the lakes is a deep mist that never lifts. It defends with an impenetrable shroud a lovely country, which is the kingdom of animals and trees and plants—a sort of Eden where beasts and birds roam happily together. When they must die, they die gently there, which is the reason why bones of dead animals are never to be seen in any part of the forests near it. If ever a man did find his way there, not one of the wild beasts would touch him.

But the forests are wonderful enough without the addition of fairy-tales. Exiles, yearning in vain to return there, remember how they sat in the stillness and green darkness of the wild hunting-grounds. Crimson berries flame on the little hillocks. The moss is like a silvery carpet. The soft tap-tap of the woodpecker, as though crying in a game of hide-and-seek, "I spy," sounds hollow from tree to tree. Feathery-tailed squirrels run up and down the branches. The horns of a stag gleam past as he bounds across the glades. Perhaps far, far off ring the horn of the chase and the baying of the hounds; but to the hunter who, weary of his gun, is sitting dreaming on a log, it seems as

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if he were at sea. The green branches are swaying and rocking overhead like waves, and the crashing of the wind in the topmost crowns of the great trees might be the roar of the ocean itself.

Although there are magnificent mountains, the Carpathians, in the south of Poland—that is to say, in Galicia—Poland is in the main a flat country, a plain open on all sides. Their land thus being greatly exposed to their enemies, every Pole in past history lived in the saddle. They had always to be ready when the summons came to ride against the invaders. To this day the Poles remain a most courageous and high-spirited people; with the tradition of their knights behind them, most chivalrous and courteous. A man greeting a lady will bow low over her hand, and always kiss the hand of his hostess on taking his leave. A younger woman kisses the hand of an older woman.

The Poles are passionately fond of mother earth, and their life is chiefly spent in the country, looking after their estates and managing the farm that the manor house always possesses. The typical Polish country house would look rather plain to our eyes: low and long, with a sort of veranda at the entrance. The life is very simple and patriarchal. The ladies of the house feed the flocks of poultry close to the house door, superintend the kitchen, help in the needlework, make bread, bottle fruit. In many houses it is the rule for each daughter to take by turn the entire housekeeping for a week. She has to go into the kitchen and attend to what is being done there, see to the laundry and all domestic matters.

The manor house is often at a great distance from

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the nearest railway-station. A Pole would think nothing of starting on a drive of twenty miles to catch his train. But life in the Polish country house is not dull; on the contrary, it is very pleasant. Hunting, riding-parties, picnics, are favourite amusements. The Poles are the most hospitable people on the face of the earth. They never turn a hair however great a number of unexpected guests descend upon the house. A party of hunters, returning from their day's sport, will ride up uninvited to the house of a friend, calling out, "We are very hungry!" No matter how many of them there are, they are warmly welcomed. The cooks turn to, the girls working on the farm are summoned in haste, and, with the daughters of the household lending a hand, a bountiful repast is soon ready. If a Polish girl feels inclined to take a little change of air, she has her horse saddled, and off she rides to the house of some girl friend, knowing that she need not announce her visit beforehand, and that she can stay there as long as she likes.

The Polish servants are quite accustomed to these invasions of visitors; it is part of the day's work. In the Polish country house, the servants are members of the family, and treated as such. The men servants chime into the conversation while waiting at table. The women servants, clad in short cotton coloured jackets over their skirts, and wearing coloured kerchiefs on their heads, comment to her face, with the genuine pleasure and interest in which there is no familiarity, upon a guest's pretty dress or hat. The devotion of the servants to the family to which they belong stops at no sacrifice. In the Great War the Polish manor houses were burnt down by hundreds.

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Those terrible years, when Poland was the battlefield of Russia and Germany, reduced much of the country to a desolate waste, whence landowner and peasant alike were driven from ruined homes. At that time a certain mansion was burnt to the ground that had been in the possession of the family for seven hundred years. The master of the house was just then absent. He was in a completely different part of the country, hundreds of miles away. A faithful servant felt that his master must be told what had happened to his home; he therefore set out himself on foot to tell him. He begged his way, half starving as he went, through the country that war was ravaging. What were to him the miles and miles that separated him from his master, if only he could render him this service and show him his sympathy in his misfortune?

But besides the domestic work that fills up a good deal of the time in the Polish country house, and the outdoor amusements, the master and mistress of the house have plenty to do for the peasants round them. They look well after their wants, and help them in their troubles.

The Poles are a very highly educated race, and extremely musical and artistic. Polish boys and girls study and read a great deal, and make a special point of learning languages. The aristocratic families especially have French and English governesses for their children, who are treated as the honoured guests of the house; and we often meet young Poles speaking English fluently and with only a very slight foreign accent, who have never been to England. Poles have generally a great gift for languages, perhaps

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because their own is a very difficult one. They think nothing of knowing half a dozen foreign languages, and it must be owned that very often a Polish boy or girl's knowledge of English literature puts ours to shame.

o And then, wherever the Pole is, in town or country, in peasant's hut or manor house, of whatever class he or she may be, dance he or she must. And such dancing! The Polish national dances of which the Poles are so fond are like nothing we would see in England. In the gay and brilliant mazurka—a completely different thing to the dance that is known in England under that name—the partners, dancing hand in hand, take completely different steps to each other. Or there is the polonaise, the most famous of all Polish dances, where one couple is pursued by all the other dancers in pairs, twisting and turning like the coils of a snake. And again the obertas, in which the men click their heels in time to the music, with a very curious effect. The krakowiak is accompanied by the singing of rhymes thrown off on the spur of the moment by the dancers. To see the peasants dance this dance, in their gorgeous costumes, with their bright streamers of different coloured ribbons fluttering and floating, is a pretty spectacle.

The great Polish musician, Chopin, took these Polish nation dances, and composed on their themes his polonaises and mazurkas that are among the most beautiful music the world has ever heard. He lived at one of the saddest moments in Polish history, when the Polish rising of 1830 was defeated, and the Poles were given over to a terrible persecution. As we listen to Chopin's polonaises and mazurkas, and

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indeed to all his music, we can hear in them not only Poland's great past and heroic struggles, but still more the grief of the Pole mourning for his country.

Generally speaking, the impression we receive as we walk or drive through the lonely Polish countryside—and if we are driving in the season of mud we get so terribly jolted that we are thankful if we do not stick fast in the mire for good and all—is that of boundless space and matchless colour. As far as our gaze can reach the flat pastures stretch to the horizon, and perhaps the skyline is broken by a dark belt of forest. We seem surrounded by vastness and air and limitless room in which to breathe. And the colours carpeting the land before us—how varied and how lovely they are! Here we have a great sheet of bright red, again a vivid yellow patch, yonder fresh green, and the gold, the rolling gold, of the cornfields. The peasant carts in which the corn is carried are low and long, made of boards with a sort of rough railing round them. We stand and watch one of these rude carts. A peasant, in his long coat reaching to his knees, sits or stands and drives. Perhaps two other peasants go before the cart, carrying the long scythes that we cannot look at without their calling to our minds the gallant peasant bands who fought for Poland armed with the deadly scythes that gave them the name of the “Reapers of Death.” The cart reaches a wayside cross or a wooden statue of our Saviour seated, with His Crown of Thorns. No Polish peasant will pass such a shrine without taking off his hat and kneeling down to pray at its feet. The cart makes its way through walls of waving golden corn. The peasant's cottage lies near. It is one-storied, painted

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white, with a shelving roof of thatch and tall crimson hollyhocks in the little garden, reaching to its windows. If the stork has built his nest in the roof, that is a sign of happiness to come. It is he who brings the gift of babies to their parents.

Having seen our peasant and his cart safely reach his cottage, we may ramble once more far and wide over the Polish countryside. We notice a sweet smell as we pass by trees bordering the way. It is that of lime-trees. In Polish the lime-tree gives its name to the month of July, for in Poland the months are called after some characteristic of the season that each of them represents. July is the month "of the lime": August, "of the sickle": April, "of the bloom," and so on.

One of the most famous legends of Polish history is connected with the lime-tree. Somewhere in the ninth century, when Polish history was in its dawn, a poor peasant, a wheelwright named Piast, was keeping holiday in honour of the birth of his son, in his hut under the lime-trees. He saw two strangers coming up to him. They told him they had been churlishly driven away from the castle of the wicked Popiel, who ruled Poland. Piast bade them welcome, spread a table for them under the limes, and gave them of his best to eat and drink. In gratitude they baptized his son, promised him that his granaries would be always full of corn and his cellars of hydromel, from which the Polish mead is made. Then they departed, and he saw them no more. But from that day, as they had promised him, he never wanted for corn or hydromel. For they were not mortal men, but angels. While Popiel and all his family were

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devoured in their castle on the lake by rats, the same angelic hands placed Piast on the throne of Poland. Thus the poor wheelwright founded the great line of Piast kings that ruled over the Polish nation for five hundred years, and only ended with the death of the great Casimir, the "King of the Peasants," who gave glory and prosperity to Poland.

The little goose-girl in charge of her flock is a figure that we shall meet wherever we go in Poland. She knits as she spends the day watching her geese, the long thin twig by which she drives them tucked under her arm. Her knotted handkerchief is carefully tied over her head. She wears a little cotton jacket printed with flowers, which is not unlike the dressing-jackets of an English bedroom. Or we may chance across the mushroom-gatherer coming home from picking mushrooms. As she walks, with her bright kerchief on her head, her basket full of brilliant mushrooms that to an English eye look like coloured toadstools, she seems a part of the woods that are flaming with autumn tints behind her.

There is a strange charm about the Polish autumn. The whole country is preparing for its long, long winter sleep, a winter unknown to us in England. Each morning the land seems veiled in silver. It is the mist drooping over forest and meadow; but as it drifts with the wind it is transfigured into a spider-web of rainbows and silver gauze, driving like an endless sea above the earth. Then the sun chases it away, and we see the forests as though on fire with a thousand colours—copper, gold, ruby, emerald, amber. As the autumn wears on there will come a deep, dead silence. You hear no songs of the peasants now in

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the fields. The cranes and the flocks of wild birds, of which there are such multitudes in Poland, all spread their wings and leave, not to return to that northern land till spring. The only sound is the cry of the wild ducks from the still unfrozen ponds, and the prolonged beat of wings, as the flocks of geese that have already begun their flight sink down on the earth to rest.

The Polish peasants have all sorts of legends about their birds. When the swallow flies away for the winter, the peasants will explain to you exactly why that happens. They say that once upon a time, some hundreds of years back, the Tartars fell upon a little village. They set the thatched roofs of the cottages on fire, and left the fields full of murdered bodies. When they went away, they carried with them into slavery a beautiful Polish girl. The maiden pined away with longing to see her home and father and mother again. All the nights she spent praying with bitter tears that her eyes might once more behold the village in which she had been born and her parents, if only to die at their feet. The Lord Jesus, say the peasants, heard her prayer. She was changed into a swallow, and every spring she flew on swift wings home, and spent the summer in her nest under the thatch of her home. Her father and mother little guessed that the bird they heard chirping so sweetly and so gaily to them was their own lost child. But they soon found out that the little bird brought them great good fortune. Their harvest prospered; their storehouse was filled, and all went well with them. The rest of the village, seeing what one swallow had brought to their neighbours, asked God to send

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them all more of these birds, and so from that day to this a flock of swallows comes with the spring to every Polish village. But with the winter they depart, as the maiden who was changed into a swallow returned when the summer was over to Tartar captivity.

Then comes the snow—deep snow that will last for months. The Polish snowstorm in the country is one of the most beautiful sights. The whole world is silver and sparkling. All the little villages are under a thick, heavy shroud of white. The cattle are safely housed in the sheds. At night we may hear the howling of wolves as they prowl around the villages, trying to break in; but the Polish peasant has small fear of them. He loves to believe that the Blessed Virgin stands with torch in hand, protecting the cottages against the fierce beasts, that will not dare to touch what she has taken under her protection. In the long evenings the women spin and the men carve, while they all tell stories, especially the legends in which the Pole delights. Polish villages are a mere cluster of cottages planted down anyhow, with no regular roads or streets; and the snow, or later the mud, lies so deep that the peasants, even the women, don heavy top-boots. They all roll themselves up in sheepskin coats, and thus protected face the bitter cold of a Polish winter.

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CHAPTER II

POLISH NATIONAL CUSTOMS

THERE are few countries so rich in national customs as Poland. They are clung to in the peasant's cottage, carried out in the homes of the rich, kept up fondly by the exiles far away from home.

Most beautiful among them all is the festivity of Christmas Eve. On that night a feast is held which is not only a sacred family gathering, but has its own sweet and solemn religious meaning.

Deep snow lies on the ground. The cold is intense, something like the dry, frosty Canadian winter. There is the gay sound of tinkling bells, as the guests, muffled in furs, drive up in sledges, little bells ringing on the horses' heads. All is ready for the supper; but it must not begin till the first star appears in the sky, which in Poland would be about six o'clock. Therefore this Christmas supper, besides the name by which it is generally called—"The Vigil"—is known also as the "Star Supper." The children are watching eagerly for the star to rise. When at last it twinkles in the sky, the signal is given, and all go in to supper.

The dining-room is lit up with unusual brilliance. In memory of our Saviour's birth in a manger, straw or hay is laid upon the table under the white cloth. Before the company seat themselves, the father, or, if the father is dead or absent, whoever is the head of the family, takes a plate containing a wafer. It has been specially prepared and blessed by the parish priest, and has some sacred sign stamped upon it—

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either the three letters that stand for the Holy Name, I.H.S., or a picture of our Lord's birth or of the Crucifixion, with perhaps a pattern of flowers on the border. The father makes a little speech, bidding those present be at peace with God and man. He then breaks the wafer with the mother or with whatever person ranks next in the family to him, and with everyone present, including the servants, and eats his portion of it. Everyone at the table repeats the same ceremony, eating a small piece of the wafer and breaking it in turn with all the others in the room, as a sign of brotherly love.

The absent loved ones are not forgotten. Where we send Christmas cards, Poles send these blessed wafers to their friends as their Christmas greeting, first tearing off a small corner to show those who are to receive them that the donor has broken it with them as a token of affection. How many Polish families have been parted from each other by exile! How many Polish sons and fathers have been driven away from their own dear land to all parts of the world! We can guess at the tender pleasure they must have felt when across the sea came these little white wafers to remind them of the old times when they too sat round the straw-covered table; to prove to them that though their places were now empty, they were there in the spirit and remembered with love.

After the wafer is broken, during which ceremony everyone wishes each other a happy Christmas, and the beautiful Polish Christmas carols are sung, the supper is eaten. It is the first meal of the day, as Christmas Eve is a strict fast in Poland. There are generally about eleven courses, but they may not

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include any meat. Almond soup, consisting of milk, almonds, raisins and rice, must always be served; and beetroot soup is also often on the table. Then come different kinds of fish—baked pike, for instance, or carp; vegetable dishes, very curious to our notions, such as small bags of paste filled with sourkraut and swimming in butter, and cabbage leaves wrapped round fried or boiled millet. The sweets include the Polish poppy cakes, greatly beloved by the Polish children. They are a compound of white poppy seeds and jam in alternate layers. These are followed by elaborate ginger cakes and all kinds of pastry. The dessert is such as we have in England in mid-winter—apples, oranges, nuts, dried fruits. Hungarian wine and the famous old Polish national drink of mead are served with the solid foods. This mead has a peculiar taste, in which honey plays a large part, though it can scarcely be called sweet. It is not disagreeable, but it requires time for an English palate to get used to it.

Towards the end of supper it is obvious that something special is going to happen. The children are all led away from the dining-room into another apartment. In comes a personage dressed as a Father Christmas, but whose name in Poland is the "Star-man." Very often he is the parish priest in disguise. He examines the children in their Catechism, reproves those who answer wrong, and sometimes, in extreme cases, arranged beforehand with the parents, has recourse to a little birch. But we will hope that this happens very seldom! Presently at a sign from the mother the Star-man tells the children that he has brought them rewards for their good conduct and

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correct answers from his own country, Star-land, and that his fairy helpers have been arranging them in the dining-room. So he leads the eager children back to the dining-room, where a transformation scene has taken place. Fancy lanterns and lights of all descriptions illuminate the room. Beautifully decked Christmas-trees adorn the corners; and we can guess the rest of the scene, because children are the same all over the world.

After supper all the family, with the servants, gather round the fireside. They sing the Christmas hymns. Then up come young peasants from the village, carrying a great paper star which they have made and lighted, singing carols. They are given presents; and, the children safely packed off to bed, the elders pass the evening chatting till midnight. They then drive in sledges through the deep snow to the midnight Mass. The village church, lights streaming from its windows on to the frozen white ground outside, is crowded with the peasants in their heavy sheepskins and top-boots, with their sonorous voices chanting the Christmas hymns. They, too, have broken the Christmas wafer. What Pole has not? Even the cattle are not left out. The wafer is crumbled into their food in memory of Christ being laid in a manger.

Christmas Day itself is kept like an ordinary Sunday. But there are several more little traditional customs connected with Christmas-tide. During the days round about Christmas, beginning with Christmas Eve, boys carolling the Christmas songs go from house to house carrying the *Szopka*, a miniature shed with puppets that act wonderfully well the sacred

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story of Christmas. Two days after Christmas, on St. John the Evangelist's day, the congregation goes up to the altar rails. The priest comes to each one and gives them blessed wine out of the chalice. This is in memory of St. John's martyrdom in burning oil.

Then comes Twelfth Night, the Epiphany. The people take with them to church small jewellery boxes, containing a gold ring, some incense and amber—in memory of the gifts of the Magi—and chalk. These objects are blessed; and when the owners return home they draw with the chalk on every door in the house the initials K. M. B., with a cross after each. These letters stand for the names of the Three Kings, which, according to tradition, were Kaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar; and they remain on the doors all the year.

As we have seen, Christmas carols are a great feature of a Polish Christmas. They have been handed down for centuries, and are extremely beautiful. A Pole who escaped from Siberia has told a touching story about these Christmas carols. He was languishing in his dungeon on his way to Siberia. All alone as he was, he had lost count of time. Suddenly one night he heard among the clanking of fetters a burst of the well-known Polish Christmas carols rising from the cell next his. Then for the first time he knew that Poles were near him, and that it was Christmas Eve.

Next it is the turn of the carnival. Gay parties—something in the nature of what an American would call surprise parties—go from house to house in the country, collecting fresh numbers of guests on the way. So warm and genuine is Polish hospitality that the

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arrival of no matter how many uninvited visitors, expecting to be put up for however long they wish to stay, is hailed with delight. The manor house is elastic, and the young men can always sleep in the barn.

All merrymaking closes with Lent. The dancing of which Poles, both the peasantry and the upper classes, are so fond comes to an end, and a fast of a very hard description is kept for forty days, during which the peasants, at all events, will touch no meat. Holy Week is given up to prayer and devout exercises. On Good Friday in some houses the looking-glasses are all veiled in black. Parents wake their children by tapping them with a little rod, in memory of our Saviour's scourging, uttering the words, "The wounds of God." Nothing is eaten all day except a little bread and water.

Easter, the day peculiarly beloved by Polish hearts, dawns with great joy upon all Poland. In every house, from the richest in the land to the peasant's hut, is spread the table of food that is blessed on Holy Saturday. The Easter feast is, like that of Christmas Eve, full of religious and national solemnity. The banquet is laid on a beautiful tablecloth of white linen, on which the history of our Lord's passion is woven. The cloth is kept specially for this occasion. Its hanging folds are decorated with box arranged in patterns with a cross in the centre. Sprigs of box, too, adorn the dishes and the bottles of wine, and are fastened into the cakes. Lovely Polish china, the best the house can produce, is put out.

All the food is cold. There must always be a boiled pig's head, decked with flowers, ham, veal, and the Polish sausage, which is strongly flavoured with garlic,

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and is very good eating. Designs made of cloves are prettily picked out in the white skin of the ham. The peasants save up their pence for weeks before Easter in order to buy the veal and ham, which positively must be on the table, if only in a few slices. Charitable societies undertake to buy these foods for the very poor who cannot afford to get them for themselves, and portion them out to each family.

In the middle of the table is a lamb holding a cross, made of sugar, but sometimes of butter. Any butter that is on the table must likewise be in the form of a lamb. This is of course in memory of Christ, the Paschal Lamb. We must not forget the chief feature of the Easter table—namely, the Easter eggs. These are a sight to behold. They are all painted—some of them in yellow, red or green; others in all sorts of exquisite tints blended together; others, again, in most elaborate and artistic designs. This is the special work of the Polish peasant women. Long before Easter they have been busy painting the eggs in a complicated method of their own. They use most wonderful patterns, all out of their own heads, so the effect is very varied and striking. The fortunate owner of these beautiful eggs keeps them as highly prized treasures under glass.

Another thing that calls for our notice on the Polish Easter table is the great number of cakes, made in special shapes that are only seen on this day. Their names would be tiresome to tell, but we may mention the tall iced cake, cut in slices from the top and served with wine and sugar, and another flat thin cake of which there are a hundred different kinds, flavoured with orange, chocolate, lemon, and so on.

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Oranges and apples complete the sweet things. Bottles of red and white wine are opened, ready for the blessing. Among them is the famous old Danzig liqueur in which float real gold leaves.

The oil, vinegar, and salt which are necessary for the blessing are placed among the eatables. Then when all is ready, the priest comes round to every house and blesses the table. Hence the name of the Easter banquet—the “Blessed,” or the “Consecrated.” When the blessing is finished, the party prepare to sit down, not at the decorated table, which is reserved entirely for the blessed food, but at another. But first, the father or head of the family takes one or more of the eggs, according to the number of the assembly, and breaks it with everyone present, as a sign of their union in the blessings and joys of Easter. At the same time the Danzig liqueur is drunk. The meal then begins.

Every Polish servant has a whole holiday on Easter Sunday. There are no meals to cook or serve, as nothing is eaten except the blessed feast. The table stands in its place for some days, and then all that is left of the provisions is burnt with the reverence due to what has received the blessing of the Church.

In the country the scene of the “Blessed Feast” is similar, but where the peasants are concerned more picturesque. The peasants assemble outside the manor house with their baskets. They spread the contents of the latter on the ground, over which they have stretched white and embroidered linen cloths. They arrange a loaf, the ornamental Easter eggs, sausage, white cheese, butter and cake, and the salt that is

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used by the priest for the blessing. Flowers and sprigs of box are scattered over the provisions with a charming effect. A bucket is in readiness filled with fresh water from the village well. The priest recites the appointed prayers, mixes the salt with the water, and sprinkles not only the food, but all the group, who, kneeling in their many coloured garments, are a brilliant spectacle. The peasants then fill bottles with the blessed water and take them to their homes.

On Easter Monday there is a very curious custom. The men visitors calling at a house sprinkle the ladies with water or perfume. The peasant boys go a step further, and souse the village girls with water out of the well-buckets. On Easter Tuesday it is the turn of the women, who favour the men with the same attention. Opinions differ as to the origin of this custom. Some say it is a pagan tradition, handed down through remote ages from the earliest heathen settlers in Poland. Others see in it a reminder that the sinner has been washed in the Blood of Christ, newly risen from the dead. Others put it down to a legend that the Jews tried to disperse the early Christians, as they gathered in Jerusalem to talk about our Saviour's resurrection, by flinging water at them.

Leaving Easter well behind us, we reach the Polish Whit Sunday. All the smaller towns and villages are decorated with garlands of birch and purple flag. In the country the peasants go round, cracking their whips outside the houses. This cracking of whips is a sign of joy; and bands of peasants gather with whips outside the manor house on the master's or

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mistress's name day, and to do them honour treat them to a whip-cracking. As the whips all crack in time together, the effect is that of a military march, and is quite musical.

Flowers and the products of the fields always play a large part in Polish life. Not long after Whit Sunday, crowns of flowers, with verses from each of the four gospels attached to them, are blessed in the churches. Then the proprietors of the estates visit each of the four corners that bound their property—the estates in Poland being so enormous that the expedition is done by driving—and lay in each corner a piece of the wreath and one of the verses from each gospel. Over these four corners a little mound is raised to mark the spot. Thus north, south, east and west, the soil of the Polish estate is hallowed by sacred words.

Then, when the summer has run its course, takes place on September 8 the Polish "Feast of Greenery." The peasants bring to church great bouquets of vegetables and corn, interwoven with a few flowers from the field and garden, that the priest blesses. They carry them home, and keep them as treasures till the same day in the following year.

The Polish peasants, and especially the girls, love their simple flowers. All the spring the peasant girls have been tending in the little cottage gardens plants of rue, rosemary and periwinkles; in the meadows they cultivate forget-me-nots and wild thyme. On the eve of St. John, June 23, they weave all these flowers and herbs into crowns. In some parts of the country not a word may be spoken while the girls' fingers are busy making the wreaths. When the evening of

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St. John's day arrives, they go either to neighbouring bridges or to the banks of the river, and cast the wreaths with a burning light in the middle of the flowers into the water. If the lover, either with a pole from the land or from his boat, catches the wreath of the girl he loves, there will be a happy end to their romance; but if the wreath is carried away by the stream, the girl watching it knows that her love will only meet with misfortune. Whoever secures a wreath in which the light is still burning will be married that year. In Warsaw the evening becomes a river fête on the Vistula, with fireworks and beautifully decorated boats and water serenades.

But we have not finished with the wreath of the peasant girl. It is her glory as an unmarried woman. She wears it for the last time on her wedding-day. She must not twine it herself on that occasion. Her friends must do it for her. As they dress her, they slip into her hair an old gold ducat that has been blessed and handed down from mother to daughter in the family, one grain of salt, and a crumb of bread. But at a given moment during the wedding dances all the married women present lift the wreath from the bride's head, which she may never wear again.

The Harvest Home is the signal for great rejoicing and mirth. On an autumn afternoon after the last corn has been carried, a deputation of peasants from the village, in their gala costumes, comes up to the manor, singing and playing their violins and bass viols. The group always includes the best reapers among both the men and girls, and an unbidden little tail of children, attracted by the music, invariably follows. It is a pretty sight. The peasants carry great wreaths



THE CHRISTMAS OF PETE SPRAW. 25

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or crowns of all kinds of corn and flowers, and sometimes branches of hazel-nuts woven among them. These are brought as an offering to the inmates of the manor. The master and mistress have the largest, but no one is left out. There is one for every child, every guest. Then the master of the house or his eldest son rises from his place in the veranda and dances in front of the house with the girl who has most distinguished herself in the reaping, and the mistress dances with the man reaper who has done best. The dance is of course one of the real Polish national dances.

To plaintive and simple melodies the peasants then sing songs in praise of their master. He, his house and family, every child he has, are lauded to the skies in these little verses that the peasants compose themselves; but the etiquette of the singers is to bring in cutting things about the neighbours of their squire, and to cry down their harvest in contrast to his. When the music is finished, the squire thanks them for all they have said about him and his, and invites them to a dance and supper in his biggest barn. The barn has been cleared out for the occasion, and the whole village dance and amuse themselves there till nightfall. A supper is served out, consisting of vodka, apples, white bread and cakes. The family from the manor always go down to the barn for a while and dance with the peasants.

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CHAPTER III

A DAY IN CRACOW

CRACOW is the chief city in southern Poland. It was the capital of Poland and the place where her kings were crowned from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth. Then Warsaw was found a more convenient centre, and so became the Polish capital.

Cracow is one of the most beautiful towns in Europe. The Tatra mountains, spurs of the Carpathians, often snow-covered, lie near it. Gardens encircle it. Exquisite old buildings, beautiful ancient doors and arches, are on all sides as we wander through the streets. The town is full of colour from the brilliant costumes of the peasants.

Every stone of Cracow speaks to the Pole of the past, as much of Poland's history was played out in this city. He gazes with love and pride on the monuments of his nation's glory that meet him at every turn. He remembers that more than a hundred years ago, after the Poles had captured it back from Austria, who had stolen it from them, Cracow remained for thirty years—from 1815 to 1846—a tiny little independent Poland, till once more Austria seized it and kept it. He remembers how then for twenty years the Austrians persecuted the Poles most cruelly, till in 1866 Austria was forced to give the Poles in "Austrian" Poland a sort of Home Rule; so that though the Poles still suffered much injustice from the Austrian Government, yet in Cracow they were more free than elsewhere. Now, Cracow is once more Poland's own.

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Let us stand in the grand old market-place, surrounded by stately palaces. On market-days, when the peasants in their bright costumes are busy buying and selling at their stalls, it is the gayest, the prettiest of scenes. That richly ornamented and quaint old building that runs through the market-place, with its graceful pinnacles and its covered arcades lined with shops, is the old cloth hall. At the other end of the square is the great church of St. Mary's. Its two towers are strangely unlike each other. The one, crowned with a gold crown and pierced with turrets, soars tapering into the heavens high above all others in Cracow. The other, much shorter, topped with domes, scarcely looks as if it were intended to be on the same building as its tall graceful companion. The story goes that two brothers were engaged in making the towers, that one of them killed the other for rage at seeing the latter's work rising quicker than his own, and thus the second tower has remained unfinished to this hour.

Not a day passes but a wild strain of music is blown on a trumpet from the taller tower. The Poles, who are so passionately patriotic, look upon these wild strange notes, ringing high up in the clouds above the towers and spires of their city, as a clarion call to be ever ready in the service of their country. And this seems the moment to speak of the giant bell of Cracow, the famous Zygmunt (Sigismund) Bell. Made out of the guns of a great Polish victory, its mighty voice, so the Poles say, can be heard as far away as the Tatra. The legend ran that Polish warriors who lie buried in those mountains should one day rise at the pealing of the bell to fight for Poland's freedom.

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If we enter the church of St. Mary's, we stand amazed at its huge length and height and breadth. On feast days two organs play together, and even they are not quite loud enough for that immense building. Poles tell us that two preachers might preach there at the same time as each other, and neither put the other out. The church is ablaze with colour. The walls of the choir seem alive with angels. With their many-tinted robes, their wings of every hue, their violins and harps and trumpets, painted by the greatest of modern Polish artists, Matejko, they look as if they were joining the sweet voices of the choir in singing heavenly praises.

Over the high altar is the splendid carving in gold and coloured wood of which the Poles are so justly proud. The Polish sculptor, Wit Stwosz, carved it in the fifteenth century. He worked at it for twelve long years, and ended his days, it is sad to relate, blind and unhappy.

But we must not forget that in the market-place there is something that is for the Poles one of the most sacred treasures that the city holds. It was here that Thaddeus Kosciuszko, the great national hero of Poland, when he saw his country, in 1794, torn in pieces between Russia, Austria, and Prussia, stood forth before the peasants whom he had armed with scythes, and swore that he would never rest till he had delivered Poland from her enemies. A tablet marks the spot on which he stood, and every anniversary of the day the Poles place wreaths upon it. Poland never forgets those of her sons who have fought and fallen to win back her freedom. In Cracow, as in other Polish towns, there is in the cemetery a monu-

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ment raised to the memory of all those who died for their nation during the Polish risings. On May 1, when Poles hang wreaths of flowers on the graves of their dead, this national memorial is covered with flowers. On November 2, All Souls' Day, the Polish students and the patriotic societies in Cracow all crowd around it and sing the national hymns.

One of the reasons why the Poles love Cracow so dearly, and why it is truly a sacred city to them, is that it is the burial-place of their kings and of some of their greatest patriots. In the old royal palace of the Wawel (pronounced Vahvel) high above the river's banks, is the cathedral church, where king after king of the Poland of the past lies in his last sleep. Here, too, are the mortal remains of Kosciuszko, Poniatowski, the great Polish soldier who, fighting for his country in the army of Napoleon, was drowned in the waters of the Elster, at the battle of Leipzig, and the most beautiful of Polish poets, Adam Mickiewicz, who wrote in exile poems on the sufferings of Poland, and descriptions of the forests and marshes and country life of Lithuania, that the Poles love the best of all their poetry.

It is a wonderful and imposing sight as we enter the Wawel cathedral, and gaze upon the tombs, rich with sculpture, many of them enclosed in exquisite chapels. Everything seems to transport us to the past. As we wander round, peopling in our fancy the aisles of the church with the living figures of those who now slumber here, and who little dreamed that the country they left great and powerful was to know all the miseries of a conquered nation, we meet either in the cathedral above or in the very ancient crypt

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below, where the stone coffins of the kings are exposed to view, a student from the University—the oldest university but one in northern Europe—guiding a group of peasants round the graves of their kings, and talking to them of the history of their land. This is done as a piece of patriotic work by the better educated Poles. We notice how the poor peasants hang upon the young man's words, how they listen with almost religious veneration to the account he gives them of the past of their much loved country.

Our student shows them the great centre chapel, with its silver casket above the tomb of one sainted Bishop of Cracow, St. Stanislas, the patron saint of Poland, who was slain by Boleslas the Bold at the foot of the altar, something like our Thomas à Becket. There is a legend that when the king, shunned and loathed by all his people, fled from his throne, and was hiding, a fugitive, in the forests, he was turned for his sin into a tree never before beheld in Poland—the king of all the trees; and that is the origin of the oak.

If we ask, with the peasants, what are those flags hanging in the church, the student will tell us that they are Turkish flags, captured by the King of Poland, John Sobieski, when he at the head of a Polish army saved the Christian world from one of the most terrible Turkish invasions that ever threatened Europe. An immense Turkish and Tartar army was marching on Vienna in 1683. It seemed as if it must conquer and overrun all Europe. The Austrian Emperor appealed to Sobieski for help; for even before he had mounted the Polish throne, Sobieski had gained such splendid victories over the Turks

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that he was looked upon as the champion of Christianity. Sobieski then marched to Vienna at the head of a Polish army that in numbers fell far short of the overwhelming Turkish and Tartar hosts. To the cry of "God defend Poland!" he led the Polish battle charge. The shock of weapons was so terrific that nearly every Polish lance was shattered: but the Moslem hordes fled at the onslaught of the Poles, and all Christendom was saved. "I came, I saw; God conquered"—thus Sobieski described his victory.

We English like to remember that through the marriage of the hero's grand-daughter with the Elder Pretender, "Bonny Prince Charlie," the Young Pretender, was the great-grandson of John Sobieski. Our student will take us on to Sobieski's tomb behind the high altar, and we gaze on the carved figures of the Turks he conquered, represented as slaves on his monument. And then our guide bids us observe, where it is placed above one of the side altars, the golden stirrup of the Turkish Grand Vizier that Sobieski sent here as a thank-offering.

Again the student makes us stop at the old tomb, curiously sculptured, of King Ladislas the Dwarf who turned Cracow into the capital and, by uniting Poland when she was split up between different rulers of the house of Piast, largely helped to build up the nation's greatness. Do you notice in the hand of the dead king's statue a curious jagged sword? That represents the sword of the great conqueror, Boleslas I. the Great, who took Kieff and, as he rode into its Golden Gate, lifted his sword and struck upon it, so that the blade from the force of the blow was chipped. Through the centuries of Poland's inde-

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pendence, that sword was kept in her national treasury, and was girded on the side of every king of Poland at his coronation. It was carried off from Poland by the Russians, and stored in a museum at Petrograd. But it is said that the crown of the kings of Poland remained safe somewhere in Poland in the keeping of a Polish family. They handed down the secret of their possession from father to son, and if the day ever comes when Poland shall have a king again, that crown will be brought forth once more.

A much grander person than ourselves once stopped too at the tomb of Ladislas the Dwarf. In the seventeenth century the Swedes had conquered half of Poland. Poland's enemies were attacking her on all sides, and there seemed small hope of her deliverance left. The Polish king, John Casimir, was a defeated fugitive. The King of Sweden, Charles Gustavus, walked around the Wawel, looking with the air of a conqueror at the tombs of the kings of the country he now considered his own. A Polish canon who accompanied him pointed to the tomb of Ladislas the Dwarf, and told the Swede how that king had been driven three times away from his throne, and three times had won it back.

"Your John Casimir," haughtily replied Charles Gustavus, "has been driven away once, and he will never return."

"Who knows?" the Pole answered quietly. "God only is all-powerful, and fortune is inconstant."

His words came true. A monk named Kordecki, a favourite hero in Polish history, with only a few other monks and a handful of soldiers to help him, drove a Swedish army from the walls of Czenstochowa, and

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the whole tide of battle changed in consequence. The Swedes were thrust out of Poland, and John Casimir returned. Czenstochowa, a wonderful sanctuary fortress, towering over the Polish plains, has always been the shrine beloved of the Polish heart.

Then we all go on to the beautiful statue of the good Queen Jadwiga, where it lies with clasped hands above her last resting-place. As we crowd about that tomb, on whose steps flowers lie and the devout peasant women kneel down and pray, our student will tell us how she loved her nation more than her own happiness, and gave up her lover for the good of her people. And what he tells us is this.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century the crown of Poland passed to a maiden, one of the most beautiful princesses in Europe. Her name was Jadwiga, which is Polish for Hedwige. She had lived all her girlhood at the Hungarian Court, her father being king of both Hungary and Poland. She was betrothed to a handsome young German prince named Wilhelm, whom she loved with all her heart. Her father died, and the Polish nobles summoned her to be crowned in Cracow in this very church. On her arrival at the castle of the Wawel, however, she found that the Polish nobles had other plans. To the north-east of Poland, between that country and Russia, lay the wild land of Lithuania, with its great marshes and those mighty forests of which we have already had a glimpse. The people spoke, as they still speak, a strange tongue that has no other in the least like it in the rest of Europe, and which learned men believe comes from

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the East. In the days of Jadwiga they were still pagans, even at the late date of the fourteenth century. They worshipped fire and the trees in their forests. They believed that serpents were a sort of guardian to the house, and drove evil away from it, so every Lithuanian homestead kept its pet snake, with a bowl of milk on the floor for it to lap. A heathen and rough prince, Jagiello, was reigning over Lithuania when Jadwiga became Queen of Poland. Now the Polish nobles said that if only Jadwiga would give up her German lover and marry Jagiello, all Jagiello's lands in the East of Europe would be joined to Poland, and be her surest defence against Russia, which was only separated from Poland by Lithuania. The whole of Lithuania would become Christian, and Poland be so powerful that she need fear none of her enemies any more.

This suggestion struck death to the heart of the young princess. On the one side there was the handsome prince whom she passionately loved; on the other, a stranger who in her eyes was little more than a barbarian. And yet she saw that by marrying Jagiello she would bring both him and countless souls into the Christian fold, and save her nation. The sacrifice seemed too terrible to face.

Her lover came to Cracow, and she, desperate, determined to fly from the castle and be married to the man she loved. So one night she fled down the stairs, whose ruins we may still see in the old Wawel palace. The sentry refused to let her pass. She snatched an axe from his hand and struck at the gate. But she was overheard. An old noble hastened after her and besought her for the love of Poland to go back.

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She did go back. Casting herself on her knees before a crucifix hanging on the wall, she wept and prayed all night, till at last she gained the victory over her own heart. Jagiello was baptized by the name of Ladislas: and his wedding to the girl-queen of sixteen was celebrated with great pomp in the Wawel cathedral. No one from that moment ever saw any signs of the grief that wrung Jadwiga's heart. She accepted the hard lot she had chosen for Poland's sake with a sweetness that never failed. After the marriage the royal couple went through Lithuania. The people were baptized by thousands and thousands on the banks of the river. The sacred fires that had been kept burning to the gods were put out for ever, the snakes driven away. Thus was this wonderful conquest of Lithuania brought about without one drop of bloodshed.

Through many sufferings and difficulties the saintly Queen spent her short life doing good to her subjects, to whom she was ever as the tenderest of mothers. One day, not long after her marriage, the King unjustly robbed some peasants of their cattle. They came sobbing to the Queen and asked her help. She persuaded her husband to put the matter right; but she could not forget what pain the poor people had suffered. "You can give them back their cattle," she said to the King, "but who can give them back their tears?"

Beautiful embroideries from her own needle are preserved to this day in the churches of Poland, and her rich gifts shown in the treasury of the Wawel. The Poles can never forget the sacrifice she offered of herself for Poland, and the glory she brought their

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nation. She remains the most beloved of all their queens.

Our student shows us that very crucifix beneath which Jadwiga, weeping, consented to save her people at her own cost. It hangs in a side chapel of the Wawel, and the golden spur won by Sobieski, that we have already looked at, is placed at its feet.

Such are some of the sights we behold in the Wawel. The student and his peasants are not half-way through them, but we still have so far to go and so much more to see that we can wait no longer. As we leave the church, we think of that happy day during Napoleon's wars when the walls of the Wawel echoed to the sound of soldiers' spurs as Poniatowski walked down its aisles after he had turned the Austrians out of Cracow, and the Poles were once more—but not for long—in possession of their own fair city. The hero, as we have seen, was drowned, protecting the retreat of the French, refusing to save himself by flight. "God confided the honour of the Poles to me; to Him only will I give it back." These were his last words before the waves of the river closed above his head.

The old palace of the Wawel brings up a good many images, some very sad ones, to our minds. These stately old halls and apartments of the Polish kings were put to great ill-usage and sadly spoilt and knocked about by the Austrian garrison, quartered in the castle before the Austrians gave Home Rule to Galicia. The Poles had the pain of seeing their beautiful things at the rough mercies of the soldiers who were in the Polish national castle for the very purpose of keeping the Polish nation ground down. Those were dark days. Polish boys were never allowed to speak

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Polish to each other in school. The police went from house to house searching for Polish books. Any Pole who had a Polish book, or even lent one to a friend, went to prison. On the mere suspicion of loving their country, Poles were imprisoned or shot.

When at last the Austrian Government improved in its treatment of the Poles, the Wawel returned to Polish hands; and the Poles set to work to repair the harm the Austrian occupiers did to it. They are still busy restoring the grand old castle whose arched galleries are a delight to the eye.

From the tower of the castle we see a lovely view of beautiful Cracow, with its many towers, its green trees in the pleasant walks round the old fortifications, the river Vistula flowing, glittering, through it. The sight of the river recalls to us the legend of Wanda, and the very name Cracow the tale of the foundation of the city. The legendary hero, Krakus, fought and slew a dragon: and where the dragon fell he built Cracow, called after his name. A German prince sent to ask for the hand of his daughter and heiress, Wanda. Rather than give herself and her country over to the enemy of Poland, one night as the moon shone on the waters of the Vistula on which we are now gazing, she threw herself into its waves, and was drowned. She was taken from the stream: and as she lay white and beautiful in the moonlight all her people came and wept to see her dead. Two great mounds are still shown dating from pre-historic ages, beneath which tradition has it that the bodies of Krakus and Wanda lie.

But, talking of mounds, there is a hill outside Cracow with a curious and high mound upon its summit.

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That is, say the Poles, the greatest treasure of Cracow, and the glory of the city. It is the famous Kosciuszko mound.

When Kosciuszko died in exile in Switzerland a statue seemed too small a thing to raise to his memory. It was decided that a large mound of earth, in the style of the Krakus and Wanda mounds, should be erected in his honour: and that mound was to be thrown up over soil from the battlefields where the great patriot had fought for Poland. A specially chosen band of Poles was sent to all the battlefields to gather the earth. Sometimes it was no easy task. The Poles, for example, wished to carry to Cracow earth from the exact spot where, in one of Kosciuszko's splendid victories, had stood the Russian cannon that a band of peasants armed only with their scythes had captured. But a potter's hut now stood just there. The potter, hearing what was wanted, had no hesitation. He knocked down the fireplace he used for his work, and the soil was dug up from beneath it. All the earth thus collected was carried to Cracow in carts covered with flowers, and laid in the heart of what was to be the mound. Every one of the throngs of Poles who were present at the ceremony brought earth in barrows, in shovels, or in their bare hands, and strewed it over the spot so that the mound began to rise. For long afterwards processions of men, women and children streamed out from Cracow to the hill, each one to cast more earth on the mountain-top, till at last the great mound was finished.

Now it stands sixty-five feet high, overlooking the Polish city with the beautiful Polish mountains stretching away in the distance. It is an everlasting

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memorial of the love of every son and daughter of Poland for the noblest of national heroes.

There is a legend that when a Bohemian princess, St. Kunegunda, was about to wed one of the kings of Poland, her father, before she started on her journey to her husband's country, told her to choose some gift to take away with her. The young princess said that she would wish to have something that would be for the good of all her new subjects, whether rich or poor: so her father bade her when she reached Poland throw her wedding-ring into a pit and order that a search should be made for it. The princess did so: and the ring was found embedded in salt. Mines were opened to work the precious salt that was now known for the first time to exist in Poland: and this is the legendary beginning of the great salt mines of Wieliczka (pronounced as Veehlitchka), near Cracow. They have been worked for hundreds of years, and are one of the most valuable products of Galicia.

We can easily visit them from Cracow. We descend into immensely deep pits, seven stories deep, right into the rock-salt. We go down by stairs from story to story, and find ourselves in a perfect maze of passages that run for sixty-five miles. All manner of curious sights we do not expect to find in a mine meet our eyes. Here and there are chapels, with altars and statues of saints in niches all round, all made out of salt: great obelisks and pyramids: enormously high and vast chambers, lit up by chandeliers so that the walls sparkle like diamonds, though the general aspect of the salt in these mines is not white but grey. Then we are shown subterranean lakes on which the visitors ply in boats: and an uncanny experience it

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is to find ourselves on the water in these great caverns, surrounded by grey walls of salt, more feet below the earth's surface than we care to count. The Polish miners are very kindly and courteous, and offer us cake and wine, and sing to us. The salt is of an excellent quality. Poland is very rich in minerals: and Galicia has huge petroleum fields, the largest supply of that valuable material in Europe.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLISH CHILD

It is upon the children, the nation's future men and women, that the fate of that nation depends. The oppressors of Poland knew this, the Poles knew this; therefore during Poland's bondage a double battle was always going on over the head of the Polish child. The foreign rulers of Poland were determined that the Polish child should not be allowed to be Polish; he or she must be made into a German or a Russian, as the case might be. But the Polish fathers and mothers were equally resolved that their children should be devoted Poles. They trained them from their earliest years to be faithful to their dear land, however hard and terrible the penalty might be. And so even Polish children took part in the great work that can very seldom fall to the lot of children living in a free country like ours—the great and noble work that we call patriotism.

Let us look a minute at the dreadful difficulties that were put in the way of Polish children by those



POLISH PEASANT COTTAGE.

The Polish Child

who ruled their nation. Sad as this story is, all of us, and especially our English children, ought to realize at what a cost the Polish boys and girls succeeded in remaining Poles. Now this state of things has happily ended, and Polish children are as free as ours. But we should pay every honour both to them who endured so much and to their parents who fought so hard and so successfully against the most terrible odds to preserve their sons and daughters for Poland. We must never forget that the present-day Poles owe the preservation of their nationality to the sufferings of those who went before them. Therefore, let us see what used to happen, before the Great War delivered Poland, to Polish children ruled by Prussia and Russia.

In "Russian" Poland the education of the Polish child was entirely Russian. All the Polish schools were closed by the Government or forced to become Russian. The Polish children might never hear their own language in the school, or even speak it to each other there. In certain parts of Poland it was the law that their very religion must be taught them in Russian by masters of a different faith to theirs, and ignorant of it. They might be told nothing about the history of their own country—or, worse, the master would tell them absolute untruths, jeer at their kings and heroes, deceive them about their nation, so that they should learn to hate their own country. What torture this was for the patriotic Polish child! He would go home and repeat it indignantly to his mother, from whom he had learnt the truth.

Did the Polish children in "Russian" Poland, then, lose their language and nationality? Never. Under heavy penalties if discovered, the children were

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taught secretly by Poles. Forbidden by the Government to have their own schools, Poles, with the greatest generosity, gave immense sums of money to keep private schools going. As long as the Government forbade such schools to be opened, they were carried on in secrecy and great danger. When for a short time the Government gave the Poles leave to have their own private schools, they were still supported entirely by private pockets: and they were again kept in secret when once more in the last years before the war the Government began again to close them. And how was it that the Russian Government did for a while—a very short while after 1905—give this leave? It was thanks to the Polish children, backed of course by their parents, who went on strike, and absolutely refused to attend the Russian schools. The class-rooms were almost empty. The Russian masters could not go on talking to vacant benches where no one was sitting, and teaching when there was no one there to listen.

These private schools that devoted men and women started and carried on so bravely, with such danger to themselves, led an existence, so to speak, from hand to mouth. If the Russian Government knew that they were Polish, that all the lessons were given in Polish, and that the Polish children were being taught to be good Poles, and allowed to hear the history of their country, the school would have been closed and the teachers sent to prison, to say nothing of Siberia. The police could pay an unexpected visit any moment, but the Poles took care to be always ready. Someone in the school was always on the lookout. When the pupils were acting a Polish play, or giving a

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concert with Polish recitations and Polish songs, great precautions were taken, and somebody kept a watch at the doors, lest the police should suddenly appear. The most dangerous moment was when the Russian inspector visited the school. The butlers and servants were on guard in the garden, and gave the alarm. The teachers handed on the news to each other. By the time the inspector reached the house, every Polish picture was safely bundled out of sight, everything put away that could arouse suspicion. It was done like lightning. Like a shipwreck drill on board a great liner, when the passengers are taught the exact places to take in case of shipwreck, so in the private school in "Russian" Poland everyone beforehand—teachers, children, servants—knew what to do, and were well used to their parts.

The inspector came in, speaking, of course, in Russian, and was answered in Russian. Perhaps he noticed a rather remarkable number of young servants about. They were not servants at all. It might so happen that some of the Polish teachers were not natives of "Russian" Poland, but came from "Austrian" or "Prussian" Poland. Every Pole in "Russian" Poland of course knew Russian. He was obliged to know it. But it was very unlikely that Poles belonging to "Austrian" or "Prussian" Poland would be acquainted with the Russian tongue. If the inspector addressed a question in Russian to a master that the latter could not understand, or if the inspector discovered that the master could not speak to his pupils in Russian—for of course the inspector fondly imagined that all the lessons were in Russian—it would have been found out at once that the work

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of the school was entirely Polish, and very dangerous consequences would have ensued. The school would have been confiscated, the children all sent away, and the teachers have seen the inside of a Russian prison. So directly the inspector was known to be on his way to the school every teacher ignorant of Russian dashed into his servant's uniform and was ready.

Poles took all these dangers far more quietly than we might suppose. Besides being an extraordinarily brave people by nature—both men and women, for even the Polish girl scarcely knows what fear is—they were too used to the difficulties and perils of their lives, and the uncertainty of what would happen next, to lose their heads in a matter of this kind. They met it with unshaken good-humour, and even with a large spice of fun at playing a little trick upon their oppressors. For example, instead of hanging on the walls the picture of the Tsar, Nicholas II., which the Russian inspector insisted on finding in a place of honour, as an affront to the Polish nationality, and which as a matter of fact had been thrown into a cupboard somewhere, the teachers used to whip out a picture of our own King George, who happened to resemble Nicholas II. in features. They proceeded to hang up our King in a dark corner where the light fell so badly that the inspector could not see it clearly and took it for the Tsar. He was satisfied. So were the Poles!

We could tell many and many a tale of similar scenes in the Polish forbidden schools in "Russian" Poland. We could tell how a little slip of the tongue made in one of these schools by a Polish teacher speaking through the telephone was overheard, and the



After the painting by W. Tętmajer



After the painting by T. Janaszewski

POLISH CHILDREN

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school was only saved from destruction because the head of it chanced to have influential relations at one of the foreign Embassies. And in another school where Polish girls were being trained and educated in everything that could make them lead a good and useful life, they were forced to pretend they were not at school at all. Beds, furniture, etc., had to be packed out of sight at a moment's notice.

In "Prussian" Poland the Polish child was as badly off. Tiny children, children in the infant school, might not hear a single word of Polish. Even the catechism must be learned in German and the prayers said in German, though naturally these little children did not understand a word of German. If they refused to speak the language that was not theirs, and attempted to say their prayers and catechism in their own language, the only one they knew, they were most cruelly flogged by the German masters. The parents, hearing the cries and screams of their little ones, rushed to the schoolhouse to protest against the masters' cruelty. They were fined, or else they were sent away to prison, even if they were the only breadwinners to put food into the mouths of their children, who had no one else to help them when their parents were taken from them.

Poor little Polish children have died under the lash of the German master, simply because they would not speak German instead of their own Polish. When they were not flogged, they were kept in for hours at school. If a little Polish boy had been flogged into a high fever, and was so ill that he could not go to school and serve out his time of detention, his father was fined. Besides this bodily ill-usage, the children were loaded with abuse on the part of the German

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masters, who called them "Polish pigs," and other names of the kind.

As the children might not hear one word of Polish, even to explain the German words, they came home without having learnt anything at all. This is the sort of way in which the German master taught the Polish children in the village school. He wanted to tell them the German for "scratch," but he wouldn't use the Polish word by which the children could understand it, so he used a sign instead. He rubbed his cheek hard, and told the children to say the German word. The children could not imagine what he meant. One of them thought, "Can it be toothache?" It must be. So the whole class called out at the top of their voices: "Toothache." The German master was furious, and probably caning followed. Whose fault was it but his own?

The children, trained to it by their parents at home quite understood the very great question that lay behind all this—how they were traitors to their country if they allowed the German master to succeed in making them forget and despise their language and nation, traitors to their God if they left off praying in their own dear language that they learnt at their mother's knee, and prayed instead in a foreign language that foreign tyrants were forcing on them in order to change them into Germans. But the Germans, whatever they did, could not make Germans of Polish children. The German tongue was in the children's eyes simply the most hateful of all their lessons. They connected it with blows, and with all the ill-treatment they received at school, while their own language was the sweet and holy tongue of home and church.

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A little Polish boy was running home from school one day, when he met a Polish priest. The priest stopped him, and began to talk to him.

"Tell me," said the priest, "what prayers you learn at school."

The little boy gabbled off the Our Father in German, slipping half the words, and rattling it off anyhow.

"Now," said the priest, "let me hear you repeat the Our Father in Polish."

This was a very different story. The little boy took off his cap, knelt down on the ground, folded his hands, and said the Our Father in Polish, very slowly and devoutly, as if he were in church.

Even these young children understood the beautiful lessons of sacrifice and suffering for their country. They knew perfectly well what it meant if in school they refused to pray or learn their religion in German. They were white with fear, thinking of the rod that was ready for them, and yet they were firm and steadfast, and faced this dreaded bodily pain rather than give up their Polish prayers and their Polish language. After these sad scenes at school, bands of little children, some almost babies, have been seen, bleeding and bruised, going all together to the wayside cross that stretches its arms by the Polish road, kneeling down to tell our Saviour that they offered their pain to Him who bled for them.

Children of the upper classes were in no better plight. There was not a single Polish boys' or girls' school allowed in "Prussian" Poland. The school life of the Polish boy was a most wretched one. He could never look back upon his schooldays as do English boys, who even when old men will tell us that

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the happiest years of their lives were when they were at school. High-spirited as the Polish boy is, and full of life, he was treated like a cur by his German schoolfellows, and still more so by the German masters. Scholarships and special rewards for clever boys were not allowed to be gained by the Polish pupil, however gifted he might be. How often, sitting at class, did he listen to the German master mimicking his language, telling atrocious untruths about his nation, cracking the most insulting jokes against Poland! He could only keep silence, while his whole heart was hot with rage and pain. The books put into his hands were full of falsehoods about everything that is dear to a Polish heart. He could not protest. If he did he would have been expelled. Nor might he learn any Polish history, or anything about his own poets and writers.

Sometimes Polish boys gathered together in a little club at school, to read the beautiful poetry of their nation, and to study its glorious and romantic history. What could be a better or more innocent way of spending their free time? And yet some years ago, when at a German school a little association of this sort among the Polish boys was found out, the consequences were terrible. These boys were publicly expelled. This meant that no school in Germany would receive them, or any University. Their education was thus entirely at an end, and they were cut off from any profession—such professions as the Poles were allowed under German rule, which were very few. Further, the boys, all of them of high Polish family, were condemned to serve in the Prussian army as common soldiers for three years.

If even a Polish book, a history of Poland, a book of

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Polish poems, was found in the desk or in the possession of a Polish schoolboy, he could be expelled. How hard a time the Polish boys had who did not know German well may be imagined, for every lesson had to be learned in German. The Polish boy must have been glad indeed when he turned his back for ever upon his school!

But there was one place, both in "Prussian" and "Russian" Poland, where the Polish boy and girl might be taught as a Pole, and the only place—the home. It is the Polish fathers and mothers who saved their children and brought them up for Poland. Poor hard-working parents, weary with the long day's toil, would give up their only hours of rest to teach their children the Polish teaching they might never have at school. The Prussian Government did all it could to prevent children being Polish even in their own home. It would not allow Polish children to have a Polish tutor or governess. All the Polish teaching, then, fell on the mother. But a policeman was permitted by the Government to go into the private house at any moment and search every room to see if the children were being taught Polish. But even here the Poles knew well how to defend themselves. There is just one room in Germany that police are forbidden to enter; that is the mother's bedroom. So the Polish lady of the house collected her children together, and they all went into her bedroom, knowing they were quite safe there, though nowhere else. There, sitting round their mother's bed, the children were taught in secret all their history and all the things the Pole must know.

But if a charitable Polish lady dared to gather the little peasant children around her, and for very pity

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teach them their catechism in Polish, she was sent to prison. One lady who was caught by the police on this work of mercy was thrown into a bare prison cell, where she remained without any bed or any other furniture for five days. Not that this deterred Polish ladies. They were determined to save the children at any cost, and went gladly to prison for their sake.

In the meanwhile the children in the only part of Poland where, before the war, the Poles were free to open Polish schools—"Austrian" Poland—were not behindhand in their love of their country and in their work for her. They who might learn and speak Polish in the schools and go to purely Polish schools helped their little compatriots who might not. They collected pence which were sent to the private funds for the secret teaching of the Polish children in the persecuted parts of Poland, for these private funds could only be kept up by generous free gifts. The money that the children in "Austrian" Poland presented to the school funds was given under the heading, "From children to children."

Painful as this struggle was for Polish children, making them always remember their schooldays as the most unhappy in their lives, yet it had its great share in making their future manhood most valuable to their nation and to their fellow-Poles. From the beginning they learnt to face difficulties and to be faithful to the great cause for which they endured them. They learnt to realize that there are bigger things in life than ease and comfort. Is it surprising, then, that the chief thought of Polish men and women is how they can best serve their country for whom they have proved their love by suffering for her even as children?

“ Great ” Poland

CHAPTER V

“ GREAT ” POLAND

WHEN we leave Cracow, we might go sailing down the Vistula, and without getting off our boat we should pass, not only through what used to be called “ Austrian ” Poland, but through what was known as “ Prussian ” and “ Russian ” Poland; now parted no more, but one united country, the free Republic of Poland. Though Poland was by a cruel fate divided physically for a hundred and fifty years between Austria, Russia and Prussia, one and the same river, her great river, the Vistula, ran through all the three outwardly divided parts of Poland. Its waters wash two capitals—the old capital, Cracow, and the city which has been the capital of Poland since the sixteenth century, Warsaw.

No wonder that the Poles love their Vistula. It seemed to be always murmuring to the Polish ear the refrain that however much the Poles had been parted by artificial boundaries forced upon them by conquest, no conquest could ever make them anything but brothers, children of the same mother-country, hoping and waiting to be united into the one free land they dwelt in as of old.

Going down the Vistula, we should notice dams, many of them hundreds of years old, built all along the banks. These were constructed to protect the flat shores from the overflow of water, because in the bitter Polish winters the river freezes for months together. Then when the ice melts in the spring there are terrible floods. The rushing waters break over

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the low banks of the river and cause a sad amount of damage. The Russian conquerors of Poland shamefully neglected the care of the river; but now that the Poles have the control of their beloved Vistula they are taking the matter vigorously in hand. Doubtless the river will become the busiest of waterways, and be a source of great riches and prosperity to the nation.

It is very interesting to watch from the deck of our boat, as we float past the flat shores, the stores of beautiful timber, oaks, pine and birches, being carried down from the Polish forests to Danzig, whence they will in time reach Western Europe. The Poles use rafts a good deal, and we pass many going up and down the stream. They are picturesque craft, each with its small cabin in which the raftsmen sleep. We notice the raftsmen skilfully wielding his long pole. He has no oars. The current takes him swiftly along. He steers and keeps the raft in position with his long pole. He uses it for an anchor when required. There is a whole population of Poles who live entirely on the water—a very simple and attractive people, always busy with their rafts and barges.

The Vistula flows into the Baltic at Danzig. This quaint old port was once Poland's, but since Prussia helped herself to it when she partitioned Poland, it was lost to Poland, and unfortunately was not restored to the Poles after the War. In the days of Poland's glory our English ships put in there many a time, and one day we may live to see a Polish fleet riding once more at anchor in the waters of Danzig, again a Polish port.

We are now in "Great," or Western, Poland. It was the old town of Gneizno, which we are accustomed to

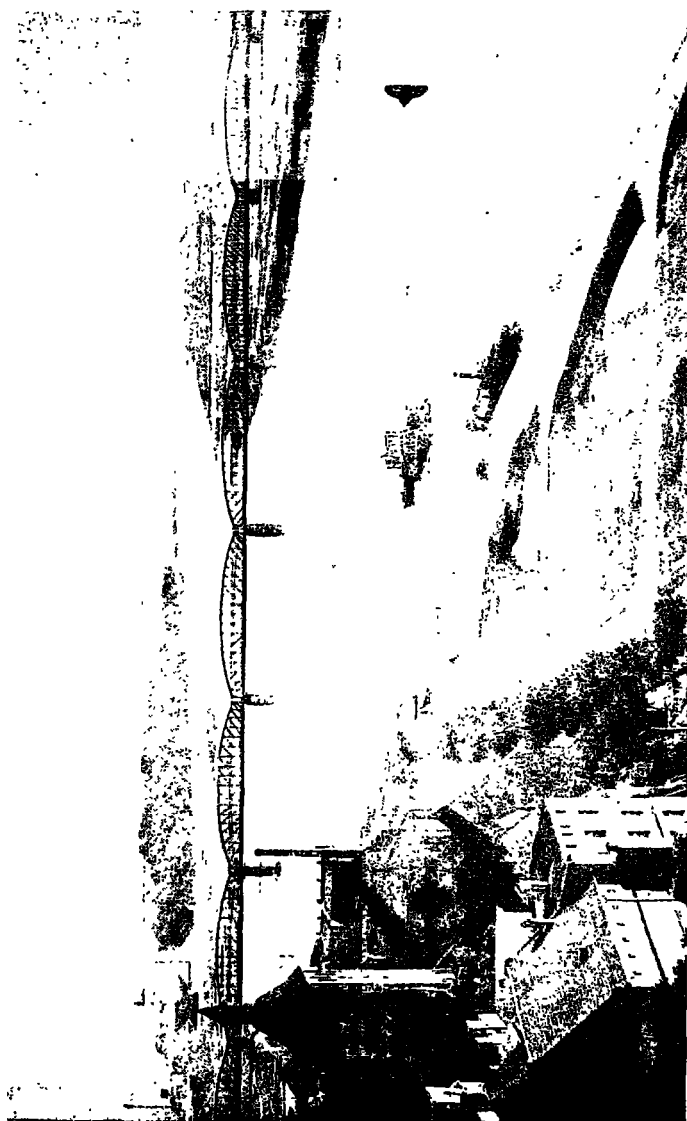
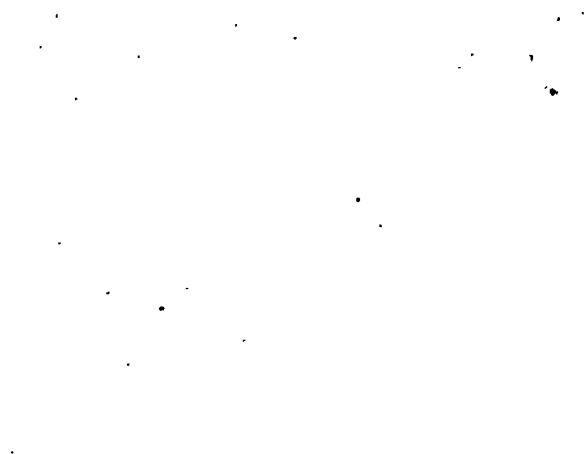


Photo: J. Brubaker, H. Yano



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hear called Gnesen, that was the earliest capital of Poland. One Lech, the Polish chief in the sixth century, discovered a nest of beautiful snow-white eagles on a rock. He took it as a sign that he should build a town there, which was the origin of Gneizno. The white eagle has remained the badge of Poland. We see it on the Poles' patriotic pictures, on the tombs of their great men, stamped on their papers and books, and above all on their flags.

Whole regiments of Poles, known as the Polish Legions, fought in the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte, who had promised to deliver their country, and whom the Poles loved and worshipped even after he had broken his word. They went to battle under their own flags, which proudly showed the white eagle, singing a national song that the Poles still sing at patriotic meetings, “ Poland has not perished,” that is now the Polish national anthem. These eagle flags always went into battle wherever Polish regiments fought in foreign armies. At the time of the Great War, numbers of young Poles, the sons and grandsons of Polish exiles living in France, were seen fighting for our French allies under the Polish flag, a white eagle on a red ground. That flag, pierced by the glorious rents of German fire, bears the inscription: “ French and Poles, friends from all time.” For France has always given a hospitable home to the Poles when they were driven by exile from their own country.

The cathedral at Gneizno is a very venerable building. There, too, lies the body of St. Adalbert, who, coming into Poland from Bohemia in the tenth century, converted the Poles to Christianity. He composed the earliest of all Polish hymns, which is

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engraved on his tomb. He was martyred by pagan Prussians, and the Poles were so anxious to lay his remains in their own city that they bought his body of the Prussians by its weight in gold. Gneizno is charmingly situated among hills and lakes.

The Polish peasant will tell you some curious tales about Lake Goplo, to which, once we are in "Great" Poland, we may pay a visit, and indeed must, because on its shores when history was still dim the Polish race first settled. The peasants say they can hear the sound of bells from beneath its waves. These bells are ringing in towns accursed for their sins that in pre-historic ages sank down into the water. One of the greatest of Poland's poets loved to fancy the lake haunted by a beautiful nymph rising and floating on the lake, with flowers in her hair and moonbeams playing about her, casting enchantments on mortal men. All around it are great marshes. The Poles never forget that this part of Poland is the birthplace of their nation, and they love it accordingly. It was the scene of the most protracted struggle between the Poles and the Germans, who kept an iron grip on it since the partitions, till the Peace of Versailles handed it back to Poland. No two nations could be so utterly unlike each other as Poles and Germans, or have less in common with each other. This made the Germans all the more determined to prevent the Pole being a Pole. It made the Pole all the more determined always to remain a Pole.

Poznan, or Posen, as the Germans called it, is the capital of "Great" Poland. It is a modern looking city, bright and busy, with delicious bits of old buildings in unexpected corners. Its lovely old town hall is its pride; and a watchman blows a blast from the

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tower of the hall each evening. In its cathedral lie two of the earliest kings of Poland—the great Boleslas, of whom we have already spoken, and Mieszko I., who won Poland to Christianity. On their tombs the figure of the great warrior grasps his sword, and the other holds the cross. Hard by the cathedral is an old gate and part of the ancient wall of the town, through which we pass out to the Polish plains, dotted with bright, clean cottages and with beautiful ancestral mansions. There are fine picture galleries and museums in Poznan. In one of these museums there is a great hall lined with glass cases, full of life-sized figures wearing the brilliant national costumes, collected by two patriotic ladies.

But had we visited this Polish city before the Great War, when the Germans were ruling it—this town that by right should have belonged to Poland, just as much as, say, Canterbury belongs to England—our first exclamation might have been: “Why, we are in a German town. It is not Polish. The porters at the railway-station are all speaking German. Yet they look Polish.”

We go into the buffet to get something to eat. We call the waiter, who is certainly a Pole, and give him our order for coffee and rolls in Polish. He glances round uneasily, and whispers:

“For heaven’s sake, madam, don’t speak to me in Polish. If the German officials overhear me speaking my own language I shall be dismissed, and I have a wife and children depending on me.”

We pass the ticket office, in which a German is installed, for only the inferior porters are allowed to be Poles. None of the good station posts may be a Pole’s

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on his own railway. There is a great disturbance going on. Why does the clerk refuse to give a ticket to that poor old Polish woman, who is asking for it in Polish? Another Pole comes up. Who is by his side? An interpreter who asks for his ticket for him in German, and therefore he gets it. What is the meaning of all this? No Poles may take their ticket in Polish in the part of Poland under Germany, and if they do not know German they must pay somebody who does to come along with them and take it for them.

We go out into the streets. Why, their names are all German—and such names! Wilhelm Square, Bismarck Street, and so on. The Poles have to see the names of their streets, of their towns and villages, all changed into German. The poor peasants sometimes actually lose themselves in consequence. They take a railway ticket to the town whose name they know in Polish; they cannot make out the German name, and no help will the German guard or ticket-collector give them. They are carried on beyond their station, spend hours in the train, or are hopelessly stranded somewhere.

“Look,” says the Pole who is accompanying us, “at those hideous buildings. Do you know what they are?” and he tells us. It is the place where the Germans carry on their business of sending German families and German labourers on to the land that belongs to the Poles, so that the land shall belong no more to Poles, but Germans. Any day the Polish master of a house may get a letter from the German Government telling him he must leave the estate where his family has lived for hundreds of years. He

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has no choice but to go, and his property is filled by Germans.

We have seen how passionately Poles love their soil. They love every inch of it, and must have their garden about them. The dream of the Polish peasant is to have his own little bit of ground, on which he can build his neat cottage and surround it with his little garden, in which he can grow his own vegetables and flowers, such as we see when we go out into the country beyond Poznan. But the Germans were determined to do their best to keep the Poles out from having any land whatever in their own Poland, in the hope that in time Poland should be not Polish at all, but German. Therefore the Germans passed a law forbidding the Polish peasant, even if he could buy the land, to build on it any sort of house, even the roughest little shed. So then the poor, hard-working Polish peasant, when he had toiled year after year to have his peaceful little home on a piece of ground that was his very own, saw all that work thrown away by this cruel and unjust law. What was the good of his having land if he could not have a house to live in there? But the Poles are not easily beaten, especially when it is a question of their nationality. If a Polish peasant might not live in a house on his own ground, yet live there somehow he would, so he got a gipsy cart, wheeled it about on his land, and slept in it. Or he and his family settled down in a sort of cave on the banks of the river near his mill. He might work the mill, but he was not allowed to live anywhere on the ground where it stood.

In those old days we saw Bismarck's statue in Poznan. No Pole even glanced at it as he passed.

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Bismarck was the most cruel persecutor of the Poles, and his statue was put there to wound their patriotism.

"Come with me," said our Polish guide, "and let me show you the statue of the man we love, and that we are not allowed to have in a public place in our own Poznan."

He takes us to the statue of the great poet, Mickiewicz, where it stands tucked away behind buildings and railings. A Polish boy who went and laid a wreath at its feet was heavily punished by the German masters of the city.

Our Polish companion asks us to step with him into the post-office. He wants to send a telegram to his brother. We are astonished to see him send it in German, and not in Polish. But if he sends it in his own language the post-office will not take it. He may send it in any foreign language that he likes—Chinese, if he knows Chinese! The one language he is forbidden to send it in is his own.

When the Pole writes to a friend or relation, he puts on the envelope various complimentary titles, which, roughly translated, would read something like, "To the illustrious great mighty Mr. or Mrs. So-and-So." This surprising mode of address does not startle the Pole in the least. He or she is well used to it, and it means nothing more than plain Mr. or Mrs. would mean here. It is merely the custom of Poland, that most courteous of countries. But the Prussian Government would not hear of such a thing being done by Poles in "Prussian" Poland. No matter that the name and number of the street were perfectly clear. There must be no distinctively Polish feature on a Polish wrapper. So every envelope, card, or

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parcel thus addressed to a Pole was detained at the post-office. If the Poles chose to pay a fine, they could after five days have these letters and parcels sent on to them. “Our letters go to prison for five days,” said the Poles.

But the nimble wits of the Poles moved a good deal quicker than those of the Germans over them. They found out how to get the better of this absurd rule. When the postman arrived with the postcards and requested the fine, the recipients would say: “Just wait a minute.” They hurriedly cast their eyes over the cards, and then said they would return them to the post-office, they did not want them. The post-office was obliged to take them back, with the result that presently it became blocked by shoals of cards, which was very inconvenient.

The other move the Poles took was to beat a German law by another German law. If, through not being punctually delivered, the contents of a parcel—fruit, game, cheese, and so on—are spoilt, the authorities in Germany are bound to pay compensation to the persons to whom they were sent. After five days of knocking about in the office the contents of these parcels may be imagined. Indeed, we should rather not enter into details! We can also imagine that the Poles took very good care—quite especial care—to claim the damages. The result of all this was that the Germans, instead of gaining anything, found perpetual inconveniences heaped on their heads, and had at last to give way in the matter of the letters and parcels.

All this our friend explains to us as we leave the post-office.

We then take a stroll about the shops. Every shop

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has a German signboard above the Polish one. One of our party has a troublesome cough, and we go into a chemist's for some lozenges or for a cough mixture. An old man, very poor and shabbily dressed, comes in while we are there. He is coughing terribly, and wants the same remedy that we do. And the chemist won't give it to him. He answers the poor old man's Polish with a storm of angry German. It is the same story as at the railway-station. Poles, even though they are the poorest of peasants, must ask for whatever medicine they want in German, or it will not be given to them. We are surprised at our Polish guide suddenly hurrying after another customer, a peasant woman with her little boy. He points to the label on the bottle she has just been buying, and says something in earnest tones to her. He tells us when he rejoins us that the label *Poison* on the chemists' bottles and boxes may never be in Polish, but must be in German ! He had run after the woman to warn her that what she had in her hand was poison.

"You heard her call that child of hers Stas, the short for Stanislaw," he adds, when we go out of the shop. "Down in the German register he is Fritz or Wilhelm, or some German name of the sort. No matter what the Polish parents have their infant christened, after the baptism the Government have him registered by a German name."

It is suggested that we should turn into the fine Zoological Gardens. It is a lovely day, and we sit and listen to the band. We consult our programmes. They are written in German. We are in hopes that we shall hear some of the noble Polish national airs, as we are in an important Polish city, those tunes,

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either sad and pleading as the voice of an oppressed nation calling to heaven for mercy, or else breathing out the fiery accents of an heroic people.

“ Do not let us move just yet,” we say. “ We should like to hear the Polish national music.”

Our Pole gives a short laugh.

“ You will have to wait long in that case,” says he, “ either in these gardens or in any public place in the Poland that is under German rule. A Polish national air may not be heard in our own Polish towns.”

Was our first hasty exclamation as we entered Poznan that we were not in a Polish town a correct one ? Did those huge German buildings that filled the Poles with loathing and disgust make Poznan a German town ? Did those Prussian officers who stalked down the streets, thrusting Polish ladies off the pavements as they passed, those German police and German officials who treated the high-spirited Poles as dogs, with their laws and regulations that insulted and outraged the Poles' national feelings in every conceivable direction, make the Poles and their cities German ? If you stayed but a little while in Poznan, you would soon have found out that you could not be in a town more absolutely Polish. Germans can force a German appearance on the inanimate stones and bricks of a Polish town. They cannot touch its soul. And the soul of Poznan remained passionately, unconquerably Polish. Now the Prussians are there no more. We see a joyous Polish town, rejoicing in its liberty, which its men, women—yes, even its children—gained by the hourly battle they fought so long to defend their nationality.

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CHAPTER VI

WITH THE PEASANTS

THE costumes of the Polish peasants are most brilliant. They are so brightly coloured that on a market-day, or in church, or at a procession, when there are crowds of people, the effect is like a great kaleidoscope of every hue and tint. The women wear one petticoat over another. The greater the occasion, the more petticoats will they put on to do honour to the day, so that on high festivals the slimmest woman will look four or five times her natural size.

The upper skirt may be a darkish blue or green cotton, with a pattern upon it of flowers in red. Over that is an apron of the same material and design, but in a different colour. Then comes a sort of short waistcoat or sleeveless jacket, either of black velvet or of blue or red embroidered all over with flowers. Underneath this is worn a long shirt of white linen, fastened at the throat and cuffs by red strings. The full white sleeves form a very pretty contrast to the rest of the costume. Sometimes on a cold day a very fascinating leather jacket lined with sheepskin, with fur edging, is flung over the short waistcoat. It is often embroidered with a pattern picked out in red or green leather. Picturesque as this jerkin is, it is not exactly becoming to the figure, for it does away with all distinctions of age and elegance. Walking behind it, you wonder if its wearer is a girl of seventeen or a woman of fifty. She might easily be either.

On the head of the Polish peasant woman is no hat,

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but a handkerchief, so bright that a quantity of women and girls together look like a flock of tropical birds. The kerchiefs are red or yellow, blue or white, generally with flowers of a different colour worked upon them. They cover the hair entirely, and ordinarily are tied in a loose knot behind, drooping over the shoulders. Sometimes the women wear over the head or about the shoulders equally brilliant shawls. Round the throat, falling on the white shirt in a very graceful manner, are rows and rows of the beads beloved by the Polish peasant—red coral or coloured glass. Streamers of bright ribbons of all colours are a very favourite ornament with the Polish peasant girl to fasten to her headdress on gala days, and if you want to bring her an acceptable fairing, choose a ribbon. It will delight her more than anything else.

The costumes differ according to the province, and all their ins and outs would be too long to describe. But one thing we may always be sure of seeing in a Polish peasant costume, and that is colour. The Polish peasants, both men and women, must have colour about them, whether in their clothes or in their houses.

For the Polish men are not at all left behind their wives and daughters in the matter of the toilet. Their costume, like that of the women, is not the same in the various districts of Poland. You may see them in very long loose white coats, somewhat of a dressing-gown effect, reaching below the knee, embroidered with red—white and red are the Polish national colours—or with blue; girdled with a large and very wide belt. Or the coat itself may be blue with red collar and cuffs, according to the part of

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Poland in which you find yourself. The Polish mountaineers affect white a good deal. They like a red stripe, ending in a red ornament, down their white trousers. Their leather jerkin lined with sheepskin is white, with embroideries of red, green or black. Or the jerkin itself may be bright crimson.

The brown jerkin that the peasant man wears like the women, edged with fur, is often tipped with colour. His round felt hat is on feast-days and at weddings gay with flowers, ribbons and peacock feathers. The peacock—the type of immortality and resurrection from the dead—is the symbolic bird of Poland and a lucky sign. Peacock feathers are always on the scene at a Polish peasant wedding. Great jack-boots up to his knee add the finishing touch to the Polish peasant's appearance. Altogether, he is a very nice person to contemplate, and the joy of artists.

Especially in the mountainous district near Cracow the Polish peasant carries his love of beauty and colour into every department of his life. Up in these mountains of Poland, where crags tower and you come across lonely lakes in the depths of hills, we may pay a visit to a mountaineer's cottage. The first thing we notice is the beautiful carved door. There is always among its carvings a sort of circle with rays going out from it. This is supposed to be the sun rising. This image has been handed down from age to age, and descends from those remote days when the people were pagans, and worshipped the sun.

Inside, the walls are a curious rich purplish colour. It is cow's blood, mellowed by smoke and time, with which the peasants in that part of Poland paint the

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interior of their houses. A heavily carved old table stands in the room. The peasants say that when any of the family are about to die the table gives out a long, mournful crack. Carved benches are ranged against the side of the room, and the family utensils are kept on shelves upon the walls. Even these utensils are ornamented. The spoons, plates and cups, all of wood, are carved, the cups most charmingly, with long high handles tapering into a horse's head or a sort of twist. They look much too pretty and dainty for common use. The salt box has boldly worked patterns of red and blue.

Beautiful highly painted chests are an ordinary feature in the Polish peasant's cottage. They are bright green with a pattern of red flowers, or else some other brilliant colour with another equally brilliant design, or dark brown, where little yellow bells of painted flowers stand out pleasingly. These are the peasant girls' wardrobes, and, besides their clothes, they keep in the small division at the end—such as we see in old English chests—their beads and trinkets. The chest is part of a girl's wedding dowry, and goes with her to her husband's home when she marries. The stools on which the peasants sit are also painted with a pattern of flowers, and the bedstead, with its enormous billowing feather mattress, is in the same style. The Polish peasant insists that even his food should look pretty. His cheese—upon which the shepherds in the mountains chiefly live—and butter are moulded into ornamental shapes and stamped with different designs. The shepherds, going up with their flocks to the high mountains, carry decorated gourds with them, and the sticks they take to help them up

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steep places are beautifully carved. The very *Duda*—the sort of bagpipe which the Polish peasants play—has some carving upon it. You hear its strains accompanying the plaintive folk-songs everywhere in the mountains, for the peasant here always sings while he is about his work.

The Polish peasants are very clever at leather-work. Their reins and harness are decorated, and they make all sorts of charming objects out of leather. A pretty present to bring a friend from Poland is one of these little bags ornamented with a pattern of green leather, and gay with golden nails and rings. Polish artists admire the work of the peasants so much that they make beautiful china after the model of the peasant pottery. The toys that the Polish peasants carve out of wood are a delight not only to children, but to grown-up people as well—dolls, horsemen, peacocks, peasants with detachable scythes, and so on. The Polish weaving and embroidery are also very beautiful, and a favourite summer dress with girls of the upper classes is the heavy white linen from the Polish looms, sparkling with silver embroidery.

The peasants in Poland are a hard-working and very simple race; they are also intensely devout. Every Polish cottage has its religious picture as the chief ornament on its walls. When you meet a peasant his greeting invariably is, "Praised be Jesus Christ!" which the person addressed takes up with the words, "For the ages of ages. Amen." We see the peasants crowding the churches in their heavy top-boots, which drip with snow and mud into puddles on the floor; but no one minds that in Poland. A peasant will prostrate himself in the form of a cross on the pavement

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of the church, or even outside the door when the interior is so crowded that he cannot force his way in. He will lie there without moving, rapt in prayer and adoration. Someone pushing past him may accidentally tread upon his outstretched hand in the press, but the praying peasant neither notices it nor cares. Peasant women drop into church on their way to market and kneel on the floor, with their great baskets by their sides, in which perhaps a fowl is cackling, and follow the service devoutly, and then go out to their business. Men and women will crowd round a preacher, absorbed in his words, tears running down their cheeks. Or they walk miles, careless of fatigue and discomfort, in some great religious pilgrimage, in their bright costumes, praying aloud all together, or singing the beautiful hymns of Poland.

In every flower of the field, in every song of a bird, the Polish peasant loves to find some memory of Christ when He too dwelt among them. The legends he can relate to you of each are too many to repeat here. He points to a crimson poppy in the corn, and tells you that the white feet of the Blessed Virgin walking through the fields bled as the sharp ears of corn touched them, and the marks of her footprints have remained there ever since, but as flowers. The blue cornflowers are shreds of her robe. Pinks, that in Poland are little flowers shaped like nails, growing wild over the fields and ditches, sprang from the nails that fastened our Saviour to the cross. These nails, found by the sparrows on Mount Calvary, were buried by them to save what had touched our Lord's Feet and Hands from disrespect. Flowers grew from them formed like little nails, and

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so no sparrow will ever touch a pink or do it any harm.

The sparrows, the peasant goes on, were always quite silent till the day when the Hands of the Child Jesus stroked their feathers. Then they all chirped loudly for joy and gratitude, and have done so ever since. Plums were first known when the Infant Jesus was hungry and played with the dry branches of a tree; and at His touch the juicy fruit sprang forth on the twigs. The aspen-tree is accursed among trees, because in the Flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, for fear of Herod it dared not give shelter to the Travellers underneath its branches, and that is the reason why it still shivers and trembles. But the hazel opened wide its leaves, and the Holy Family hid beneath them in safety. From that day the hazel has been specially blessed, and will never be struck by lightning; and you will be quite safe, says the peasant, in the most dreadful thunderstorm if, invoking the holy Names, you take refuge like Jesus, Mary and Joseph beneath a hazel.

But on that hazel a cuckoo was sitting when the Holy Family were concealed beneath it, and to please Herod he cried aloud, by way of betraying the Infant Jesus: "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" The penalty he has paid is never to have a nest of his own again. The lark sang to Adam to comfort him as he toiled and suffered when he first left Eden, and God ever since has allowed the lark to remind men of heaven by his sweet song. He sang above our Saviour's cross on Calvary, and tried with his little beak to remove one of the thorns out of Christ's crown of thorns. He is the special little songster of Christ's Mother in Paradise, and

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under her protection, and who lays hands on a lark will be punished by blindness. On the evening of St. Bartholomew's Day, August 24, no one on earth will ever hear a nightingale sing—at least in Poland. But as a matter of fact the nightingales are all singing that evening, and a melody so exquisite that none who has listened to the nightingales on a summer's night has ever heard the like. But this song is only sung to heaven, and mortals may never catch even one note of it.

No Saturday, a Polish peasant assures you, whether in the depths of winter or height of summer, will ever pass without one ray of sun, because on that day our Saviour's little shirt was in His infancy being washed, and the sun shone out to dry it. The peasants will tell us any number of wonderful stories about the stars. If from the Epiphany onwards, for a fortnight, you look hard enough at the sky—but you must take a bright, clear evening—you will see the Three Kings going across the Milky Way, dressed in silver and gold. You must look at the part of the Milky Way where the stars are brightest, and then you ought to find them. They are not the Three Wise Men, but three other kings who once ruled upon the earth, and whom the Archangel Gabriel chooses every New Year's Day to greet Christ in heaven, as the Three Kings greeted Him in the crib. But not everyone may see them. Only people not guilty of sin will be rewarded with this beautiful sight, and whoever sees them, if only for but one minute, will be happy and fortunate to the end of his life, and die in great spiritual peace.

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CHAPTER VII

WARSAW: THE HEART OF POLAND

WARSAW is called the heart of Poland. Not because it is the capital and the most important city of what was "Russian" Poland before the war, and of that part of Poland known since 1815 to all Poles as the Kingdom of Poland, but because the greatest scenes in Polish history have been played out there. Warsaw has been the witness of the most heroic outbursts of patriotism and the most terrible national tragedies. Warsaw is associated in the hearts of the Poles with their chief sufferings and their chief hopes. Their blood has flowed in its streets. The mark of the shots may still be seen in the buildings that they defended so desperately in their uprisings for their freedom.

Warsaw has also been called the Paris of the north. The streets are crowded and full of life. The shops are most attractive. The people we pass are fashionably dressed and have a gay appearance. Even when the Poles lived in great oppression, watched and harried by the police, dogged by spies, and liable to be arrested and sent to prison and Siberia at any moment, they had far too much self-respect to allow their persecutors to see them going about with long faces. Especially was this the case in Warsaw.

Warsaw is not only an agreeable city, it is a rapidly growing place of business; and the tall chimneys of its many factories are always active. The Polish Diet—that is the Parliament—sits there now, and the

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head of the Polish State has his headquarters in the Belvedere Palace.

In the past, Warsaw has been called not only the heart of Poland, but Poland's broken heart. Behind its busy and lively streets, its gardens and shops and music, there was a background of ever-present tragedy. The world now rejoices that the dreadful days when the Poles suffered so much at the hands of their Russian rulers are gone for ever, but we ought not to pass them over in silence, for only when we hear such things can we realize what the Poles have gone through and what immense sacrifices for their country they have made.

Down the main streets we pass the old palaces of the Polish nobles. Palace is rather a big name for them, but in Poland houses are called palaces, which we should simply describe as large dwellings. They are generally divided from the street by railings, and have gardens, of which we can sometimes only catch a glimpse, if that, from the street. Many of them were taken by the Russians, and changed into public offices. The name over each street, each shop, each house, was written in Russian characters. Only below it might the Polish name be written. The wild Cossacks clattered down the streets, clearing them with their heavy whips. When the Germans captured the town in the Great War, they took down all the Russian signs and put German ones there instead. Prussian soldiers then rode there in the place of Cossacks. Thus has Warsaw been tossed between Russia and Germany. The one thing the Polish town might not possess was its own Polish belongings. Yet Warsaw ever remained the most Polish of cities, and is now once more the capital of liberated Poland.

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We continue our walk along the streets. We choose for the present the fine Krakowskie Street, one of the finest in Europe. The Poles love trees and greenery too much to be able to do without them, so even here in the centre of the town, as we pass alluring shops, churches, public buildings, palaces, we come to gardens, trees with their pleasant cool foliage bordering the roadway. We notice how nearly every man we meet raises his hat as he passes the doors of the churches. Especially does he do this, and with marked veneration, when his steps lead him by the church of the Holy Cross, outside which, above the stairway where beggars—the blind and the halt and the lame—sit and ask alms of those entering to pray, is a great statue of Christ carrying the Cross, looking over the busy thoroughfare. In that church the heart of Chopin, the Polish musician who loved his country so dearly, lay buried, till, as the Germans were entering Warsaw in 1915, the Russians removed it to Russia.

The Poles are a deeply religious people. Their religion and their love of their country go hand in hand, and seem to complete and add beauty to each other. If we go into a church in Warsaw on a Sunday or feast-day, the place is so crowded that we can scarcely find room to kneel.

We cannot help thinking of the sad sights these Warsaw churches saw some sixty years ago, just before the Polish rising of 1863. The Cossacks broke into the churches and wounded and slew the Polish worshippers as they knelt and prayed for Poland. Or, again, the Russian spies stood in the churches among the Poles, secretly watching. Any Poles who were noticed singing with special fervour the Polish

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national hymns were, unknown to themselves, followed, marked on the back with a piece of chalk, and finally cast into prison and sent off to Siberia for ever. Perhaps we may have occasion to call upon friends at the magnificent Hôtel de l'Europe, certainly more resembling a palace than an hotel, that stands in one of the chief squares leading out of the Krakowskie.

That hotel was opened in 1861, and the first who entered its great corridors, its elaborately ornamented walls, and under its painted ceilings, were the mutilated bodies of dead Poles, carried there by their compatriots. They had been shot down in cold blood by the Russian soldiers outside a church in the Krakowskie, the very street where we have been spending such a pleasant hour.

Is it possible for such thoughts not to haunt us as we wander round this city that the Poles love so passionately? We enter another square in the Krakowskie, the Sigismund Square, marked by the tall column to King Sigismund III. raised to him by his son, Ladislas IV. of Poland.

Here stands the castle which was once the palace of the Polish kings, but which, when Poland fell, became the official residence of the Russian governors of Poland.

These governors of "Russian" Poland always kept down the Poles with an iron and pitiless hand. The castle has glorious views over the Vistula flowing through Warsaw and the plain of Poland above which Warsaw stands. Its beautiful gardens slope down to the river. Its great marble halls remind us of the days when the Kings of Poland

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dwelt there; but the treasures that adorned it in their time were all carried away by the Russians after the Rising of 1830. Some of them have now been regained by Poland.

The square tells us one of Warsaw's most mournful stories. We seem to see it again as it looked on an April afternoon, in 1861, thronged with crowds and crowds of Poles. They stood there in perfect silence, unarmed, outside the castle. They stood there as a protest to the Governor against the terrible persecution of their country. Then the order was given to fire upon the defenceless crowd. The soldiers from the castle fired. Not a Pole shrank or wavered or fled. They knelt and sang the national hymn while the horrible massacre went on, falling dead with the words on their lips:

"God, Who for long ages didst surround Poland with the light of power and glory, Who didst defend her with the shield of Thy protection from all those sorrows which would have crushed her down, before Thy altars lo! we raise our supplication. Restore to us our country and our freedom."

This hymn, of which we have only given the first stanza, is sung wherever Poles gather together, and in their churches. While it is played or sung Poles reverently rise and stand. The tune is that of a sad and most solemn cry to God which well matches the words. Those of us who have heard a number of Poles singing together in their strangely sweet and rich voices these national hymns that plead for Poland, and that have so often been sung amidst death and bloodshed for their country's sake, can never forget it.

Let us pass to a more cheerful scene. But first

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we will glance a moment at one of the oldest spots in Warsaw, the market-place. How picturesque it is, with its cobblestones and immensely tall and very ancient houses frowning down upon it !

We will go down the favourite walk and drive of a Warsaw Sunday, the avenue lined with trees and gardens. It will lead us to the park, where we can stroll under the trees and through the prettily laid out paths and past the artificial sheets of water, where groups of children are playing. We shall presently reach a park on the outside of Warsaw, where we see a fascinating ornamental lake with swans floating on it and marble steps leading to a palace, or rather to a very pretty, French-looking villa.

This was the favourite summer haunt of the last King of Poland, Stanislas Poniatowski, the unworthy uncle of the hero of the same name whom we have seen dying for Poland at the Battle of Leipzig. The King loved art and letters. He fitted up the palace with statues and paintings that are still to be seen there, and ornamented it so charmingly that it is a very delightful spot. Like all Poles, he was devoted to acting, and put up the open-air theatre on the bank of the lake that adorns the villa gardens. The stage is in the middle of the water, and the actors floated to it on boats. This King, whose weakness betrayed Poland, yet who had one great moment in his life, ended his dishonoured days in Petrograd, despised by Pole and Russian alike.

While we are pleasantly roaming about the gardens of King Stanislas, another palace catches our eye. The sight of it hastily recalls our thoughts from marble villas and attractive parks. It is the Belvedere, and

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round these walls in the outskirts of Warsaw broke out, on the night of November 29, 1830, the famous Polish Rising.

We are vividly transported back to that November night, as we muse here on the very spot where these things happened. Here, close to the Belvedere, was the military school where the Polish cadets were to give the signal for their nation to fly to arms and to end the misery to which it was subjected. Two nights before that fixed for the Rising, the young men who carried this weighty secret, who were on their way to death or victory, went, as though nothing were going on, to a ball. A Polish officer pointed to them as they were dancing, and murmured into the ear of the Pole by whose side he was standing: "The day after to-morrow those young men will be dancing to another tune." His companion whispered back that he too was going to join them, and a few months after he died covered with glory on a Polish battlefield.

All Poland rose. Hunters in the immense forests snatched up their hunting guns and hurried off to fight for Poland. Poor peasants who had no other weapon armed themselves with their scythes. Boys ran off from school, and students from college. They sat round the camp-fires at night, singing the songs that young poets in the ranks wrote to the accompaniment of the cannon. Women and girls were seen leading charges, cheering on the brothers and husbands by whose side they fought. The best known among them is the famous heroine of the Rising, Emilia Plater.

She lived in a lonely and wild part of the country, near the Lithuanian forests. Long before the Rising

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she practised shooting and dangerous leaps on horse-back, to be ready when the moment came. As soon as the Rising broke out, she put on a man's clothes, went from village to village arming the peasants, and then, with her cousin, hastened off to the war. Side by side with a girl friend, she fought like a lion, till at last the division of the army to which she belonged crossed over into Prussia and was disarmed.

But Emilia could not face the idea of ceasing to fight for Poland's freedom, and with her cousin and the same friend she set out on a long and most perilous journey for Warsaw, hoping to join the Polish army there. By night they hid in the bushes, often so near the enemy that they could see their fires and hear the voices of the sentries. By day they struggled on through brushwood and trees, wading marshes. But Emilia was too weak to go farther, and fell fainting to the ground. Her cousin found shelter for her in a forester's hut and, leaving her with her faithful friend, he pushed on to Warsaw. Emilia, meanwhile, was taken to a manor house among the forests, where she was hidden and tenderly cared for. But it was too late to save her. The news reached her of the fall of Warsaw, and she died of a broken heart.

From that September day in 1830 when Warsaw fell, to our own, its fate has been one of the saddest in history. These streets and palaces by which we have been wandering have looked down upon the Poles' unending struggles and sufferings for their nation. To numbers Warsaw has been the starting-place on the long, hopeless journey to Siberia. There, in the mines of Siberia, among criminals and murderers, many a Pole has wheeled the convict barrow, and toiled

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with the pickaxe, only because he was faithful to his country. Or he dragged out his life in a wretched hut in the Siberian snows, parted for ever from home and all that was dear to him. We know Polish ladies whose earliest recollection is of the police raiding their homes. Another lady tells us that, when a little child, she remembers seeing a band of ragged, footsore young men and boys creeping up to her father's country manor, and begging for food and drink. They were the brave, doomed youths fighting for their country in 1863. Not long after they had passed on, refreshed by meat and wine, the same little girl, glancing towards the window, was startled—though she was too young to realize the fearful danger—by seeing armed Cossacks looking in. They were in pursuit of the insurgents, and asked if they had been there. In some wonderful way the suspicions of the soldiers were averted, and the manor house escaped being burnt to the ground, and the parents—at the moment absent from home—being shot or sent to Siberia, which was the penalty for all those who gave food or horses or any sort of shelter to their compatriots who were out in the Rising.

How many are the sad stories that we hear in Poland! Young men have disappeared from their homes, never to be heard of again. When they failed to return, their weeping mothers knew but too well what had happened—namely, they had been carried off to a dungeon, whither they left only for Siberia, and, whatever befell, were never seen again by those who loved them. One incautious patriotic word overheard by a spy; association in a patriotic society; teaching peasants their religion or national history—all these and a

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thousand other things that are not only natural, but even a duty to anyone who has his country's good at heart, were punishable by law. Poles in Warsaw and "Russian" Poland went to bed each night, never knowing whether they would not be waked from their sleep at dead of night—for arrests there were always made at night—by the police, come to take them off to prison. We whose lot is laid in the freest country in the world little realize what life in Poland was up to the very hour that the European war broke out.

But we may now hope that this tragic chapter is past history.

CHAPTER VIII

A POLISH WEDDING

THE wedding of the Polish peasant girl is the **most** picturesque moment in her life.

Long before the ceremony, the guests, all of course attired in the most festive of their brilliant costumes—and what these costumes are we have already seen—begin to arrive at the house of the bride's parents. In some parts of the country they do not come empty-handed by any means. They bring fat fowls, loaves of white bread, cakes, salt, flour, lard, even a piece of money wrapped up in paper. This is by way of thanks for the invitation to the wedding, combined with the delicate intention of not putting the hostess to any expense. But this custom is not universal. The guests and the manor house have already received the curious flat cake that is always on the table at the wedding-meal, and which the bride must send out before she marries. These cakes can be as large as a

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small table. Even the poorest bride will send out as many as fifty of them to her different friends.

The bridesmen and musicians assemble at the bridegroom's house. Then music begins to sound ever louder through the village, as the procession starts, escorting the bridegroom. First walk the musicians playing violins, flutes, bagpipes, and basses, gaily decorated with ribbons of every colour. Then, two by two, come the bridesmen, all young, in white coats and red waistcoats, knots of ribbon and peacock feathers in their hats. They go from door to door, singing, inviting the guests in verse to the wedding. Sometimes they are answered with bursts of song, as the guests hasten out to join them. The growing procession streams along, one mass of colour, singing as they go, the musicians playing all the time, till they halt outside the windows of the bridesmaids, with one voice bidding them come forth. Each village has its own song for this occasion. The men and girls compose the words beforehand.

Then the bridesmen, having for the present done their duty by the bride in mustering her guests, go off to look after the bridegroom. His clothes are little less splendid than his bride's, to whose house, still with music and song, he is accompanied by the bridesmen and the musicians.

Meanwhile, the bride is dressed by the women. Her apparel is gorgeous. As with the marriage customs, so the wedding clothes and ornaments are not entirely alike all over Poland. Sometimes the bride wears a magnificent high headdress something like a mitre, glittering with gold coins and rings, from which streamers of ribbon descend down her back.

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Or else she sports on her head a tall erection composed of artificial flowers. Peacock feathers and branches of rosemary may be in her wedding-wreath, but whatever the variations of the bride's wreath, depending on the part of Poland in which she lives, it is always the gayest and prettiest of decorations. In Galicia her petticoat is white with coloured stripes. Her bridal short coat is perhaps of blue velvet, embroidered with silver. In different villages the wedding coat is different as to colour, but invariably brilliant and bright. A beautiful silk flowered apron and no less beautiful silk shawl give a very festal air to the bride's appearance. Row after row of coral and amber cover her bodice.

While the bridesmen sing the simple song of the country bidding the bride ask pardon of her parents, her brothers and sisters, she and her bridegroom kneel hand in hand at the feet of her father and mother, and the father sprinkles the couple with holy water. The bride then begs forgiveness of all present for whatever she has ever done to offend them, and, embracing them, takes farewell of the companions of her old life. This ceremony is always accompanied by many tears. The next proceeding is for all the company to marshal up in order and go in procession to the church, on foot if it is near enough, the musicians leading and playing lustily. The bridesmen lead the bride, and behind her the bridegroom is escorted by the bridesmaids. The relations follow, and after them the whole village. Or they may have to drive miles to church, as the distances in Poland are very great. The musicians must be in the front cart and the bride in the last. Singing and music go on without

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ceasing till the church is reached, and the marriage is performed, the bride being given away by the lady of the manor house.

After the marriage service is over, everyone returns, not in order this time, but as they like. They look like a walking flower-garden of every brightest tint—red, yellow, green, blue. The bride's mother is before them, waiting on the threshold of her house to greet the young couple before they cross it with bread and salt. Bread in Poland signifies plenty, and salt thrift, so that the first thing that Poles always take care to bring with them when moving into a new house is bread and salt.

As the company arrives, every man catches hold of the first woman he sees, and to the sound of music they all twine and turn round the young couple. In the Poznan districts the bridesmaids must give the bridesmen each a beautiful handkerchief with lace and silver borders, decked with ribbon. The recipient uses it as a fan for the honoured guests of the evening, especially for the family from the manor, who always come in and take part in the festivities.

It is a very old custom that the first dance belongs entirely to the bride. The guests crowd against the walls, and a large circle is made by the young men, in the middle of which the bride dances, changing her partner as she goes, because she positively must dance in turn with each of the men, till she comes to the last—the bridegroom. Then begin the national dances, most picturesque in themselves, and, danced by the men and girls in their brilliant wedding costumes, giving the effect of an ever-changing, gorgeous rainbow. Bottles of vodka, bread, and cake are carried

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round by the hostess and her family to the guests, till the meal is laid and all sit down to broth, pork, chicken, pickled and boiled cabbage, and the heaped-up flat wedding-cakes of which we have already spoken. Vodka and a sort of very poor red wine wash down the solids. The bride and bridegroom are of course seated in the place of honour, and everyone else according to their importance, except the bridesmen, who wait upon the company, and the musicians, who sit by the fireplace, singing and playing. Each dish is carried in by the cooks and bridesmen, accompanied by the rustic songs that the Polish peasant loves and is used to hear on all occasions. The tunes are always the same time-honoured airs; the words are sometimes old and well known, but others are invented for the moment, though always sung to the familiar melodies.

The meal despatched, the bride is led away by the women into another room, the girls and the men beguiling the time while waiting for her reappearance by games and jokes. After perhaps an hour the oldest bridesman gives the signal for the noise to stop. The women lead in the bride, draped in a white cloth. She is seated in the middle of the room. The bridesmaids have to try and snatch the cloth away, but the older women and the men defend the bride, singing in mournful tones all through this mimic battle that the wreath shall never be hers to wear again. The cloth is torn off, and there sits the bride with her hair tightly plaited, and on her head, in the place of her charming wreath that only the unmarried girl may wear, is a sort of cap, the sign of a married woman. The idea is that the married woman, busy with the care of her house, will have no time to dress her hair

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prettily, so it must be tucked away under a cap. In some Polish districts the bride's hair is even cut off on her marriage. This is a custom strongly objected to by the bride, and she sheds bitter tears when she parts with her beautiful hair. As she sits, seen for the first time in her cap, the music plays a slow tune, and everyone present, men, women and children, sing in chorus a wedding song. Then the dancing begins over again, till the next ceremony takes place; and this is how it goes.

The men draw a circle of unthreshed wheat round the bride. The bridesmaids range themselves to protect both it and her. Any man who wants to dance with the bride must struggle through the wheat, pelted by it on all sides. Then a cap is handed round, and is filled with gifts of money for the bride. The national dances are danced again, and one curious feature in them must not be passed over. Do you notice that handsome young peasant standing with heels clicked together, silent, upright, immovable, before the gaily dressed girl whose hand he intends to ask for this dance? Why does he not ask her? He will, but he is going to do it in a little song he is getting ready, so cannot be expected to do it all in a hurry.

The dancing is kept up till the evening of the next day. From time to time the girls have slipped away to change their dresses, and returned with unabated energy. And now comes the hour for the bride to leave for her new home. Shortly before she starts the different items of her dowry are led or carried on the way before her. There is a fine cow, the beautiful wedding-chest which we have already so greatly

A Polish Wedding

admired, feather-beds, and whatever household utensils or furniture the bride's parents have given her. The bride is conducted in a procession to her husband's house. The musicians lead; then comes the bride in her wedding clothes, escorted by her parents and nearest relations and friends, while a joyous throng follow after as best they please. There is a little singing if anyone feels inclined to sing; and so they all arrive at the husband's home.

On its threshold the husband and the bridesmen are waiting for the bride. The bride's mother steps over it first. She carries in her hand a small bundle, composed of a morsel of bread, a pinch of salt, a coal, the wax of a blessed candle, and a knot of ears of corn from the wreath that was blessed in September. We know the meaning of the bread and salt. The coal implies a good wish on the housekeeping, and the wax and corn, that have both been consecrated in church, a blessing. The bride enters the door and, as she does so, the women fling after her threads and stalks of hemp to avert all evil from her first appearance in her own house, and that everything she does may have a happy ending. She changes her wedding-dress in her husband's room to that of an ordinary holiday, and then comes out to begin her new life as the mistress of the house by waiting on her guests. For the feasting and merriment and dancing go on all through the night. At last the company disperses. The last to leave are the bridesmaids and bridesmen and the musicians, who all gather outside the little veranda of the Polish house, and sing their good-bye, which is good-night. How exhausted the young couple must be by the time that they are safely married and done

Poland

with we may guess when we reflect that often the festivities are carried on, not only for three days, but for nearly a week !

CHAPTER IX

THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND

ALTHOUGH all her lands were not restored to her, Poland, as we all know, was given back her liberty after the Great War. She is now the free Republic of Poland. Her first Prime Minister was the famous pianist Paderewski, who has always been a devoted patriot as well as a great musician. Soon after she again became an independent state, Poland was forced to fight against a terrible Bolshevik invasion from Russia, which swept up to the very walls of Warsaw, and was there so wonderfully hurled back that the Poles call their victory the "Miracle of the Vistula." On this occasion Poland once more saved Europe from a flood that would have wrecked European civilization, as in old days she saved the world from the Turkish and Tartar hordes.

Poland suffered so grievously during the century and a half of her bondage that her new independent life has been a great and uphill struggle. She had been split up for so long between three foreign conquerors that everything which we have possessed as our right for hundreds of years had to be built up by her again from the beginning—her laws, her army, her coinage, and so on. In addition to this her soil was ravaged by the Great War, and it has been hard work for Poland, with very little money at her disposal, to open

The Republic of Poland

her ruined factories and recultivate her devastated fields. When, indeed, we think of all the difficulties with which Poland has had to battle, difficulties far greater than any other of the restored nations in Europe have experienced, we can only wonder at the progress she has made. Several of our politicians and public men have visited reborn Poland, and have all come back full of admiration for the country and the people. Poland has so many natural riches—coal, oil, timber, salt, minerals—that she will probably in time do a great trade with England and other countries. She is still, and it is to be feared will always be, in a very dangerous situation, lying as she does in exposed plains between Germany and Russia, with a frontier line to defend that is one of the longest in Europe. But her position is so important to the peace of Europe that it is not only for her own sake, but also for that of the whole world, that we must all wish long and prosperous life to the Republic of Poland.

